TAJ MAHAL WAS A RAJPUT PALACE

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This book is dedicated in grateful memory, particularly to the Late Her Highness MAHARANEE CHANDRAWATI HOLKAR of Indore, to whose munificence the author owes a part of his academic education, and generally to the great Kshatriya community of India which defended the faith and culture of the country against foreign invasions for milleniums with exemplary devotion to duty, courage, sacrifice, and a very high standard of magnanimity and moral purity which disting-uish it from all soldiery anywhere in the world.

PREFACE

The serene beauty, majesty and grandeur of the Taj Mahal has made it known all over the world. But what is not so well known is the true story of its origin, that its magnificence stems from its having originated as a palace.

It is a pity that the Taj Mahal is believed to have originated as a sombre tomb in the 17th Century when it was perhaps built in the 4th Century A.D. to serve as a palace.

The suddenness with which his gay and magnificent palace got converted into a tomb must have constituted a very unfortunate occurrence of Jaisingh's life.

The changeover has proved a shroud deluding everybody from lay visitors to researchers and history scholars that the Taj was built as a sepulchre.

Popular nostalgia for legendary love has helped fan the flame of Shahjahan's mythical attachment to Mumtaz into a raging fire enveloping the Taj in the dazzle of leaping flames and blinding smoke of imaginary accounts discouraging any cool, dispassionate research about its origin.

The utter incompatibility and inconsistency of the loose bits of information mouthed and written about the Taj Mahal clanking to a crescendo of jarring notes in my subconscious mind impelled me to attempt sorting them out from a tangled mass and piecing them together to find out whether they made a coherent and plausible account.

To my amazement it led me to an unexpected conclusion namely that far from originating as a mediaeval tomb the

Taj was built by a powerful Rajput king as his palace in pre-Muslim times.

My research has also led to an incidental but nonetheless important finding that the Peacock Throne too is perhaps as ancient as the Taj Mahal, and that it used to be placed in the chamber which encloses the cenotaphs of Shahjahan and Mumtaz.

My conclusions are based on a number of historical works both mediaeval and modern. Their list appears at the end of this book. I have quoted from those authorities extensively. The extracts, accompanied by the relevant details about the name of the book, author and page number, have been included in the narrative itself instead of appearing as foot-notes at the bottom of each page.

The conclusions reached in this book might unsettle some important portions of mediaeval history as currently taught and presented. But since all education is a relentless search for the TRUTH it is hoped that all readers, whether lay admirers of the Taj, prying scholars or researchers, archaeological officials or teachers of history, will neither shy away nor be scared in facing the truth about the Taj.

February 22, 1965 *P. N. Oak*

The Taj Mahal is a Rajput Palace Converted Into Muslim Tomb

Indian history having been written mainly by aliens for a millenium, abounds in many myths and misconceptions of which one of the most glaring is that Emperor Shahjahan built the Taj Mahal as a tomb for his wife Mumtaz. Nothing is farther from the truth. There is considerable evidence to prove that the Taj originated as a Rajput palace. It was subsequently commandeered for being used as a sepulchre.

Every Aspect of the Taj Legend is Suspect

A rebuttal of the current Taj legend becomes necessary because on closer examination all aspects of it are found to be unauthentic, self contradictory and based on vague generalizations.

In trying to explain away the lavish expenditure on the Taj, believed to be an original sepulchre, gullible popular opinion has been fed on the myth that Shahjahan had throughout his life loved Mumtaz deeply and on her death, was so disconsolate as to vow there and then to commemorate her in a dreamland monument. In the course of three centuries the dry stump of that planted myth has sprouted several new branch legends presenting a nostalgically formidable bush hard for anyone to demolish. The new legendary sprouts are : that Mumtaz herself before her death had asked for such a monument, that Shahjahan was so struck by the beauty of the edifice raised that he ordered the hands of all craftsmen who had worked on the Taj to be amputated lest they build a rivalling monument for someone else and a

conflicting legend that he wanted to have a black marble Taj across the river as his own tomb, a bridge linking the two so that even in heaven Shahjahan and Mumtaz could be together.

We shall examine what element of truth, if any, is there in those legends later but one cannot help wondering here how did Shahjahan hope to build a black marble Taj after having maimed the original builders so that they may not build another comparable monument.

Shahjahan was not a Tender-Hearted Patron of Art

One of the myths propagated to sustain the belief that the Taj is an original sepulchre, is that Shahjahan was a very tender-hearted lover and a generous patron of art. Historical evidence points to the contrary. Maulvi Moinuddin Ahmad has observed on page 8 of his book titled *The Taj and Its Environments* (2nd edition printed by R. G. Bansal & Co., 339 Kasairat Bazar, price Rs. 3) "European historians have sometimes charged Shahjahan with bigotry traced to the fountainhead of narrow-mindedness in Mumtaz."

In *The 19th Century and After*—a monthly review edited by James Knowles, Volume VIII, page 1041, E.B. Havell remarks in the article titled *The Taj and its designers* "The Jesuits were bitterely persecuted by Shahjahan—Only a short time before her death Mumtaz Mahal, who was a relentless enemy of the Christians, had instigated Shahjahan to attack the Portuguese settlement in Hooghly."

The *Transactioas of the Archaeological Soeiety of Agra*, January to June 1878, record on pages viii and ix "Many times did Shahjahan invite the monks and secular priests to become Mahomedans (but when they repudiated his overtures)

Shahjahan was greatly irritated and there and then ordered the priests to be executed the next day by the torture then used against the worst outlaws, that of being trampled under foot by elephants."

On page 38 of *Keene's Handbook for Visitors to Agra and its Neighbourhood* (Thacker's Handbooks of Hindustan) rewritten and brought up-to-date by E. A. Duncan, it is stated that "Shahjahan surpassed all the Moghul emperors in autocratic pride, and was the first of them to safeguard the throne by murdering all possible rivals."

On page 155 *Keene's Handbook* states "According to Roe who knew Shahjahan personally, his nature was unbending, and mingled with extreme pride, and contempt of all."

The extreme intolerance, cruelty and fanaticism of Shahjahan is clearly brought out in several passages even in Abdul Hamid's officially inspired narrative of Shahjahan's reign. On page 39 he says "It had been brought to the notice of His Majesty that during the late reign many idol temples had been begun, but remained unfinished at Banaras, the great stronghold of infidelity. The infidels were now desirous of completing them. His Majesty, the defender of faith, gave orders that at Banaras and throughout all his dominions in every place, all temples that had been begun should be cast down. It was now reported from the province of Allahabad that 76 temples had been destroyed in the district of Banaras."

In connection with the conquest of Daulatabad it is stated on page 46 of the same chronicle "Kasim Khan and Kambu brought 400 Christian prisoners male and female, young and old, with the idols of their worship to the presence of the faith-defending emperor. He ordered that the princi-

ples of the Muhammaden religion be explained to them and they be called upon to adopt it. A few embraced the faith. But the majority in perversity and wilfulness rejected the proposal. These were distributed among the amirs. who were directed to keep these despicable wretches in rigorous confinement. So it came to pass that many of them passed from prison to hell. Such of their idols as were the likeness of the Prophet's were thrown into the Jumna, the rest were broken to pieces."

That Shahajahan, far from being a soft-hearted connoisseur of art, as is sought to be depicted in erring Indian historical narratives, was a cruel and relentless despot who brought untold misery and endless suffering on sons of the soil is borne out by another passage in Abdul Hamid's made-to-order account of Shahjahan's reign. In connection with the campaign against Jajhar Singh Bundela and his son Bikramajit, launched by Shahjahan's forces, the book says "When pressed hard by pursuers Jajhar and Bikramajit put to death several women whose horses were worn out....The hot pursuit allowed the rebels no time for the rite of jauhar. In their despair they inflicted two wounds with a dagger on Rani Parwati, chief wife of Raja Narsing Deo and having stabbed the other women and children with swords and daggers, they were about to make off when the pursuers came up and put many of them to the sword....Rani Parwati and other wounded women were raised from the ground and carried to Firoj Jung. Jajhar and Bikramajit after escaping from the bloody conflict were put to death in the wilds by the Gonds in great cruelty. Khan Dauran rode forth to seek their bodies and having found them, cut off their heads and sent them to court...The emperor ordered them to be

hung up over the gate of Sehur...Shaban Khan Dauran came from Chanda and presented to the Emperor the wives of Jajhar, Durgbahan his son and Durjansal his grandson. By the emperor's orders they were made Musalmans by the names Islam Kuli and Ali Kuli. Rani Parwati being severely wounded was passed over. The other women were sent to attend upon ladies of the imperial palace......Udaybhan the son of Jajhar and his younger brother Siyamdewa who had fled to Golkonda were made prisoners and were sent to the emperor. The young boy was ordered to be made a Musalman. Udaybhan and Siyamdewa who were full of age preferred death and were sent to hell..."

When such accounts of sickening cruelty by the score can be found in a chronicle written at Shahjahan's own behest one can very well imagine what a nightmarish time the people of India from princes to paupers must have passed during Shahjahan's reign.

From the early Muslim invaders who preceded Mohammad Ghazni to the last Moghul emperor Bahadurshah Zafar it was the same tale of massacres, conversions under pain of torture and death, loot and unbridled corruption. Neither Akbar nor Shahjahan were any exceptions. They could not have even otherwise been freaks in a millenium of oppressive tradition without careful, sustained and proper parental and padagogic guidance and training. Virtue needs careful nurture. It does not thrive in an atmosphere of lechery, debauchery, manslaughter, lawlessness and intemperate addiction to spirituous liquors and narcotics which had been unfailing attributes of court life throughout Muslim rule in India.

Like virtue art too has to be nurtured and practised for

generations before it reaches perfection. Conditions under the millenium of Muslim rule in India far from fostering art repelled and downgraded it.

The intricate floral patterns in the walls and flooring of the so-called Taj Mahal and the Red Forts in Delhi and Agra, therefore, represent workmanship of the pre-Muslim period.

It must be stressed here that an artist's heart is never cruel. A hangman can never be an artist. An artist to be worth the name must be a profound philosopher and a kind-hearted soul. Shahjahan was the very antithesis of this as is seen from even the few instances quoted above.

Any number of such references to Shahjahan's and Mumtaz's narrow-minded, fanatic and cruel natures could be cited. Together, therefore, they did not make up the tender Romeo and Juliet type pair that is sought to be made out.

Shahjahan's Reign was no Golden Period

Like the so-called tender-hearted artistic urges of ShahJahan's heart aother myth equally carefully fostered which has held the field, is about Shahjahan's reign having been a golden period. The inhuman oppression that was practised in his reign has already been sampled above. From the point of view of the vast majority of Shahjahan's subjects, therefore, his reign was hell, and no "golden" period. As for the other implied connotation of the belief that Shahjahan's reign could lay claim to be a golden period because it was marked by peace and prosperity and because it occasioned the creation of many fine buildings and literary works, a closer examination will reveal that even those claims are unfounded.

Shahjahan's Reign was Marked by Famine and Pestilences

Describing the famine in Dakhin and Gujarat Abdul Hamid writes "Life was offered for a loaf but none would buy. Dog's flesh was sold for goat's and the pounded bones of the dead were mixed with flour and sold. Destitution at last reached such a pitch that men began to devour each other, and the flesh of a son was preferred to his love. The numbers of the dying caused obstruction in the road."

The Alamgir Nama of Mohammad Kazim states that on "8th September 1657 Emperor Shahjahan was seized with illness... irregularities of all sorts occurred in the administration, and great disturbances arose in the wide territories of Hindusthan ...disaffected and rebellious men raised their heads in mutiny and strife on every side...turbulent raiyats refused to pay their revenue...the seed of rebellion was sown in all directions and by degrees the evil reached to such a height that in Gujarat Murad Baksh took his seat upon the throne, had the khutba read and coins struck in his name, and assumed the title of king. Shuja took the same course in Bengal, led an army against Patna, and from there advanced to Banaras."

If Shahjahan's reign had been the golden period that it is wrongly described to have been such utter chaos and countrywide rebellion would never have erupted when he fell ill. The passages quoted above prove beyond all doubt that discontentment, disordcr, punitive campaigns, famines, corruption, massacres and immorality marked Shahjahan's entire reign. That was why discontentment seething under his oppressive hold manifested itself throughout his realm as soon as news of his illness was known. Had his rule been wise and benevolent the news of his illness ought to have evoked

touching response from his subjects. Far from that even his own sons, rose in open revolt. What greater indictment could there be of Shahjahan's (mis) rule ! Such was not the case with India's Rajput rulers because they were good fathers, benevolent rulers and noble human beings.

Shahjahan's was no Peaceful Reign

Unceasing warfare marked not only Shahjahan's reign but his entire life. When he was a prince he led an open revolt against his own father. When he became old and weak his sons fought against him and between themselves. In between this period even when Shahjahan was firmly on the throne he had no peace. Shahjahan ascended the throne at Agra on February 6th 1628 and lost effective control of the throne, when he fell ill on 8th September 1657. His rule, therefore, lasted for 29 years and seven months. During this period Shahjahan's armies had not a moment's rest. Here is a sampling of the incessant campaigns undertaken :

1. At the accession of Shahjahan, Jajhar, son of Nar Singh Deo, left the capital, Agra and proceeded to Undcha, his stronghold, where he set about raising forces. A force was sent against him under Mahabatkhan Khan Khana.

2. In the campaign against Khan Jahan a battle was fought near Dholpur.

3. In the third year of the reign 8,000 horses were sent to conquer Nasik and Trimbak.

4. Jadurai, his sons, grandsons and relations held mansabs from the imperial government. Jadurai with his two sons Ujla and Raghu and grandson Baswant were pounced upon and killed.

5. A campaign was undertaken against Nizam Shah and

Khan Jahan, around Devalgaon, Baglan, Sangamner, Chagdor fort, Bheer, Shegaon, Dharangaon, Chalisgaon and Manjira Fort. Mansurgarh was captured.

6. In the 4th year of the reign Khan Jahan took to flight past Depalpur, Ujjain and Navlai. Nearly 400 Afghans and 200 Bundelas in his force were slain. Dharur fort was captured.

7. Parenda (lying between Ahmadnagar and Sholapur) was attacked.

8. The fort of Situnda, about 50 miles north-east of Aurangabad was captured.

9. Kandahar (25 miles south-west of Nanded and 75 miles east of Dharur) was taken.

10. Operations against Mohammad Adil Shah of Bijapur were undertaken in the 5th year of the reign.

11. The emperor returned to the capital, Agra from Burhanpur after a long stay tired and angry because Azam Khan had proved ineffective in managing the affairs in the Deccan.

12. Hugli fort was captured.

13. The fort of Galna was the scene of another campaign.

14. In the 6th year of the reign Bhagirath Bhil, chief of his tribe in Malwa, rose in revolt.

15. In this same year an extensive campaign was undertaken to destroy Hindu temples.

16. Daulatabad was conquered.

17. Kasim Khan and Kambu brought 400 Christians under guard. The prisoners including females were asked to turn Muslims or face torturous death.

18. In the 7th year of the reign Prince Shah Shuja marched against Parenda fort. Many engagements were fought in its neighbourhood.

19. Jajhar Singh Bundela and his son Bikramajit rose in rebellion. The campaign against them centered around Bhander, Undchha and Chauragarh fort. This campaign like many others, is a sickening tale of brutal torture by Shahjahan's forces.

20. The fort of Jhansi was captured.

21. The imperial army was despatched to subdue the Nizamshah.

22. In the ninth year of his reign the emperor himself proceeded south to participate in the campaign to reduce Kandahar, Nanded, Udgir, Usa, Ahmednagar, Ashte, Junnar, Sangamner, Nasik, Trimbak and Masij.

23. Khan Jahan and Khan Zaman headed campaigns against Bijapur. Battles were fought at Udgir, Indapur, Bhalki, Kalyan, Dharasheev, Mahuli and Lohagaon. Khan Zaman entered Bijapur territories and plundered and destroyed every inhabited place he came to......records the Badshahnama of Abdul Hamid. Kolhapur was captured, Miraj and Raibag were plundered and the forts Anki, Tanki and Alka, Palka (36 miles from Daulatabad) were captured.

24. In the 10th year of the reign the fort of Junir was captured. The pursuit of Shahu through the Dakhin across Mahuli and Muranjan led to Shahu's surrender along with the young Nizamshah. They were also required to surrender forts Junir, Trimbak, Tringalwadi, Haris, Judhan, Jund and Harsira.

25. The Bundelas rose in revolt under Prithviraj, son of Jhajhar, who had escaped earlier massacre.

26. Zafar Khan, governor of Kashmir was ordered to proceed against Tibet, with 80,000 horse and foot.

27. In the 11th year of the reign Kandahar and other forts were captured.

28. Kuch-Haju ruled by Parikshit and Kuchbihar by Lakshminarayan rose in revolt.

29. A campaign was undertaken in Baglana area comprising nine forts, 34 parganas and 1,001 villages.

30. In the 12th year of the reign Manikrai, Raja of Chetgaon was subdued.

31. A punitive expedition was sent against Sangi Bemkhal, ruler of Great Tibet, who had seized Burag in Little Tibet.

32. In the 13th year of the reign an attacking force advanced from Sistan against Kandahar. Khanshi fort near Bust was first occupied but later abandoned.

33. Prithviraj, son of Jajhar, was captured and imprisoned in Gwalior Fort.

34. In the 14th year of the reign an expedition was sent to chastise the rebellious Kolis and Kathis in Gujarat and against the Jam of Kathiawar.

35. Jagat Singh, son of Raja Basu of Kangra led a revolt against the emperor.

36. In the 15th year of the reign a campaign was launched against Jagat Singh. Mu, Nurpur and other forts were captured.

37. In the 17th year of the reign the imperial forces had to be sent against the Raja of Palamau.

38. In the 19th year of the reign a campaign was undertaken against Balkh and Badakshan which were keys to the

acquisition of Samarkand. Murad Baksh was sent with 50,000 horse and 10,000 musketeers, rocketmen gunners etc. The emperor himself had to proceed to Kabul. The fort of Kahmard was captured and Kundaz and Balkh were conquered.

39. Sadullakhan had to subdue rebellious elements in the conquered territories.

40. Aurangzeb who had been sent to the troubled territories had to surrender Balkh and Badakshan to Nazar Mohammad Khan, and retreat in the 20th year of Shahjahan's reign.

41. In the 22nd year of the reign the Persians advanced against Kandahar. The imperial army was sent to defend the territories but Bust and Kandahar had to be surrendered after long and desperate battles.

42. People in the territories of Gazni complained of total destruction of their crops, and plunder of their belongings by Shahjahan's armies in the 23rd year of the reign.

43. The Tibetan campaign resulted in the subjugation of that area in the 25th year of the reign. An immense force was also despatched for the recapture of Kandahar.

44. The siege of Kandahar continued through the 26th and 27th years of the reign.

45. In the 28th year Allami was ordered to demolish Chitor and chastise the Rana.

46. In the 29th year of the reign a campaign was launched for the capture of Golkonda and Hyderabad.

47. In the 30th year of his reign Shahjahan ordered his son Aurangzeb to lead a campaign against Bijapur.

48. During this period which marked the end of

Shahjahan's troubled rule the imperial army had also another irrepressible enemy in Raja Jaswant Singh.

A very brief and cursory survey made above should give the lie to the repetitive blind assertions in current Indian historical texts that Shahjahan's reign constituted an era of peace and plenty. This assertion, unwarranted by facts was propagated during Muslim rule to explain away the false claim that Shahjahan undertook such fabulous projects as ordering an expensive, glittering Peacock Throne, raising a fabulous tomb over the dead body of his second wife, founding and building an entire city of Old Delhi, building the Red Fort in Delhi, building a huge Jama Masjid in Delhi, and God knows what else.

British scholars were the least interested in disputing the claim since it hardly mattered to them whether the claim went in favour of one individual or another so long as it was some Indian and not a Westerner who ordered the many expensive projects mentioned above. They, therefore, lacked the incentive to investigate the many absurd claims made in favour of Muslim rulers by sycophant chroniclers, resulting in a remarkable naivete which has characterized their researches in Indian history. Taken in by superficial appearances—for example believing a monument to be a tomb because it contains a grave-like mound—they have allowed their good sense, discretion and judgment to run away with fantastic beliefs and absurd explanations which men of ordinary intelligence and judgment would normally question and deem doubtful. Thus for instance when they could not explain away the existence of the buildings believed to contain the remains of Hoshang Shah (at Mandavgad), Akbar (at Sikandra) and Iltmush (in Delhi) during the lifetime of those rulers, Western scholars

advanced the facile explanation that those rulers ordered the construction of those tombs themselves in anticipation of their deaths. Nothing could be as absurd. The Muslim rulers in India, steeped in carnal enjoyment all their lives, would have been the last persons to "dig" their own graves in the most literal sense. And that monarch after Muslim monarch had a penchant for digging his own grave is something fantastically absurd.

A similar juvenile credulity is apparent in the case of the Taj Mahal and the many other expensive projects attributed to Shahjahan. It has already been pointed out that from adolescence to senile oldage Shahjahan's life was a constant struggle against heavy odds—consisting of revolts by him or against him, and incessant defensive or offensive wars. His treasury had extremely heavy demands made on it as a result of war and unrest throughout Shahjahan's rule. As such he could hardly afford the luxury of wasting huge amounts in ordering a fairytale palace for sheltering the remains of one of his numerous consorts.

Besides the impossibility of Shahjahan's having the necessary funds to throw away on an absurd sepulchral project Shahjahan was the last person to be sentimental. He was a pleasure-seeker. All descriptions of his disconsolate lament over Mumtaz Mahal are fake. They are such as are recorded as a matter of routine like the condolence messages now-a-days frequently exchanged between dignitaries. Such messages are a routine affair automatically recorded by scribes and clerks, in glowing terms, without even the person in whose name they are conveyed, so much as knowing what the message conveyed was. We all know that for lack of real heart-felt grief in royal households (because of want of intimate personal contact and

warmth) mourners used to be hired by the score to break into a loud and incessant wail. It used to be a command performance throughout the period of official mourning switched off and on to order during memorial ceremonies. Since Shahjahan was a hard-hearted pleasure-seeker he would hardly be bothered about the death of one of the many thousand inmates of his harem.

Fake Graves

A very important point seems to have escaped students of mediaeval Indian history both Indian and non-Indian. They do not seem to know that in India during Muslim rule it had been the practice to raise false grave-like triangular mounds. The intention was to claim the area from the local owners or the Government under religious duress. I know of such false graves having existed on temple terraces in Dharampur in Central India, and at severai roadside sites. All the triangular mounds that look like graves in mediaeval monuments or on roadsides, therefore, do not necessarily shelter dead bodies. Such mounds were set up to act as scarecrows to scare away rightful owners of the land. It was a subterfuge to oust the local population inch by inch from their own soil, and advance the cause of the invaders. Somehow it has been a weakness of the local people that once their palace or temple had been disfigured by some Arabic or Persian lettering or by grave-type mounds that was enough to prevent it from recapture or use, even by local Indian resurgent forcees. The building got automatically preserved without even so much as a watchman to protect it. Such was the sentimental awe in which the local people regarded it. Having scented this weakness the invaders and the people they proselytized took to this very easy subterfuge of raising

cenotaphs in their wake wherever they went. This practice has also resulted in misleading students of history in classifying from superficial appearances, certain mediaeval buildings as Muslim tombs rather than earlier Rajput temples and palaces.

So far as the Taj Mahal is concerned it may be enshrining the remains of Shahjahan and Mumtaz but what I want to stress here is another aspect. Like raising false mounds appearing like graves, deaths in royal or noble families were also made occasions to oust unwanted local people from their castles and mansions. That killed two birds with one stone. While it ensured a 'fitting' burial at no cost it also weakened the local population *vis-a-vis* the foreign rulers by depriving them of their strongholds. The doleful occasion was used as a lever to browbeat and oust the real owners from their hereditary mansions. Available evidence shows that this was what happened with regard to the palace known as the Taj Mahal mistakenly believed to be an original tomb. There was an added attraction. The palace had fabulous furnishings like gem-studded marble screens, the famous Peacock Throne and a lush garden. By insisting on burying one of his wives in Jaisingh's hereditary palace—now known as the Taj Mahal—Shahjahan, in a sense, secured all that (wealth for himself) and 'heaven' (for his wife) too.

Agra in Pre-Muslim Days

In order to arrive at the correct conclusion regarding the origin of the Taj Mahal it is necessary to probe the history of Agra city, and see whether before the advent of the Muslims the city did actually boast of expert masons and craftsmen and rulers who could conceive and build a monument like the Taj.

Keene's Handbook for Visitors to Agra and its Neighbourhood states



This barred entrance to the underground passage from Taj palace to Agra Fort is yet another proof that the Taj was a palace before being converted into a tomb. To the left (not shown here) is a multistoreyed well adjoining the Baradari which used to be used as a palace bath. The nethermost rooms inside the well were used as the palace treasury.

on page 1 that "the Sanskrit root 'gr' embedded in 'Agra,' indicates its existence from pre-historic times, either as a fortified city, or a city with a citadel. And the grounds for believing that Agra can boast as hoary an antiquity as any city in India, are fairly well established......Tradition favours an antiquity upwards of 2,000 years before Christ......Agra was doubtless ruled by Ashoka, 263 to 223 B.C....The first recorded mention of Agra, is by the Persian poet Salman who died in 1134 A. D." (A footnote on page 2 of the book says: "According to Salman, the fort of Agra, was after a desperate assault captured from one Jaipal by Mahmud, the Pathan ruler of Ghazni......Regarding this stronghold the poet writes 'seen from afar amid dust-laden clouds the citadel loomed forth severe and grand'.")... "The author of Tarikh-i-Daudi states that Agra fort was used by Kanishka as a state prison." (A footnote on page 3 says "There is also traditional mention of other Rajputs, occupying places not far from Agra, such as the Sikarwars at Fatehpur Sikri and the Moris at Kiraoli.")

The book goes on to say "After beiug sacked by Mahmud, Agra regained some of its importance and remained for nearly two centuries in the possession of the powerful Chauhan Rajputs principally, whose chief, Visala Dev of Ajmer overthrew the Tuar Rajputs in 1151 and added Delhi to his dominions. Tradition assigns to a Rajput chief Badal Singh the erection of a fort here named after him Badalgarh...It is well established that Agra had a citadel when Bahlol Lodi occupied it."

Sikandar Lodi succeeding his father Bahlol in 1488 moved his court to Agra in 1502. "Since then it remained the capital of India for about 150 years" states Keene on page 6 of his *Handbook.*

Above is quite a plausible account of the origin and importance of Agra since ancient times. In fact "Agra" as written and pronounced in Devnagri is अग्र which is a pure Sanskrit word meaning "front". It therefore signified a front-ranking city both because of its wealth and splendour and because of having been the capital of the Rajputs. Like the modern idiom of designating the President of a democracy as its first citizen, in ancient India the capital was ranked as the first city. That explains the significance of the term "Agra" in Sanskrit. That is borne out by Sikandar Lodi's preference for making Agra his capital when he found that it was safe to reside there. It is well known that a certain prestige accompanies established capitals, and conquerors prefer ruling from the place from which their defeated predecessors ruled. This should suffice to prove that Agra had been the capital of leading Hindu empires prior to the advent of the Muslims, and that it was renowned for its fort and other magnificent buildings so as to justify being called the "first city."

Agra was full of "Good Buildings"

A footnote on page 14 of Maulvi Moinuddin Ahmad's book *The Taj and Its Environments* says about Raja Jaisingh (a contemporary of emperor Shahjahan) that he "was a Sanskrit scholar and was acquainted with Turkish, Arabic and Persian languages......Many good buildings were built at Agra by Jaisingh but they are all gone, only their locality is known by the name Jaisingpura."

That all of Jaisingh's buildings have been lost without a trace is a falsehood can be apparent on a little reflection. Since Shahjahan was a contemporary of Jaisingh, and all the buildings attributed (albeit falsely) to Shahjahan are extant

it sounds so ludicrous that only Jaisingh's buildings could have been singled out by time for total extinction. The only conclusion one can draw from the above scrutiny is that Agra which was a front-ranking city, a leader in building fashions as New York is today, the capital of vast empires since time immemorial, had within its confines many "good buildings" built by one Jaisingh or another. It did have the Taj Mahal and the so-called Etmaduddaulah centuries before Shahjahan, since those are the only two buildings besides the Agra fort and the main mosque in Kinari Bazar, which remind one of the magnificence of ancient Agra.

False Claims by Muslim Chroniclers

False claims by Muslim chroniclers are not peculiar to the Taj Mahal alone. Such claims have been made with regard to almost all extant mediaeval buildings. We have seen earlier that *Keene's Handbook* in a footnote on page 3 mentions that Fatehpur Sikri was the stronghold of Sikarwar Rajputs, and yet that magnificent deserted township is blatantly attributed to the Moghul emperor Akbar.

A footnote on page 2 of the same book similarly bears witness to the fact that the Red Fort in Agra had existed several centuries before Akbar and yet it is attributed to that Moghul emperor. Prior to Akbar sycophant chroniclers had made similar claims with regard to Sikandar Lodi. He is said to have built not only the fort in Agra but also founded a city of Agra. In this connection on page 6 of the book it is stated "Sikandar Lodi is said to have built a city, and some remains on the left bank of the Jumna opposite Agra are believed to be its only remnants." One wonders how Sikandar Lodi during his tumultuous regime could found an entire city. And if at all he founded a city how has it been

entirely wiped out. This exposes how facile and false traditional claims in favour of Muslim authorship of buildings have been.

In continuation of the account of Sikandar Lodi *Keene's Handbook* says "He (Sikandar Lodi) is also credited with building a fort at Agra...Badalgarh upto Akbar's time is the only fort at Agra mentioned by historians ; and had Sikandar Lodi built a fort on either bank of the Jumna there would surely have been some traces of it in evidence." This shows how Keene discounts the claim made on behalf of Sikandar Lodi that he was the builder of Agra fort. Is it any wonder then that similar false claims have been made later in favour of Akbar and Shahjahan of their having been the originators of Agra Fort and the Taj Mahal respectively.

Continuing the account of Agra fort it has been mentioned on page 9 of Keene's book that "Humayun was crowned at the palace in Badalgarh." The palace referred to is obviously the part currently known as Diwan-i-Khas. On page 10 it is stated that "Sher Shah followed Humayun (who was in full retreat) to Agra, and took possession of Badalgarh." On page 11 it is stated "It may be conjectured that he (Jalal Khan the second son of Sher Shah) built a palace within Badalgarh from the fact that a spot in the fort is known by his name." This assertion exposes a peculiar naivete of British schclars. For them the mere name was enough to ascribe a place to a Muslim ruler. It is thus that the founding of whole cities like Ahmedabad and Allahabad have been ascribed to Muslim rulers. It is surprising how Western scholars and our own, who were subservient to the British during the latter's rule in India, failed to give any thought to the implications of founding a city. Such a feat involves complicated survey, a high

degree of technical talent, haulage of huge quantities of material, enormous expense and a peaceful atmosphere. None of India's Muslim rulers had either the time, resources, acumen or need for all that. They had come to loot a wealthy country and lord it over. It was not for nothing that they came thousands of miles from their native desert lands leaving their hearths and homes and shedding blood all the way in the face of determined opposition.

The above-quoted extract shows that some sycophant chronicler or mere name-sake tradition claims at least a part of the Rajput-built Badalgarh for Sher Shah's second son Jalal Khan.

On page 14 of *Keene's Handbook* it is stated that "Akbar first came to Agra in 1558 and, on this occasion took up his residence at a spot now occupied by the villages of Sultanpur and Khawaspur, shortly afterwards moving to the old fort of Badalgarh." A closer examination of this sentence will prove revealing. It has already been mentioned earlier that "Khawas" was the term applied to the children of Rajput rulers. The children resided around the ruler's palace. That palace was what is now known as the Taj Mahal. Its surrounding locality was known as Khawaspur. Since Akbar's armies must naturally have occupied Agra fort, sprawling all over it, Akbar must have taken up his residence in the Khawaspur palace now called the Taj. Later for the sake of safety, and also to be with his troops he must have considered it more prudent to live within the battlemented confines of the citadel at Agra. Here, therefore, is another indication that the Taj existed even in Akbar's time.

Going back to the falsification of the real history of Badalgarh we find the following account given in *Keene's Handbook* from page 14 onwards. "Though for many years

Akbar was actively crushing rebellion and extending his empire, he frequently visited Agra ; and it was on one of these occasions in 1565 that he commenced the razing of Badalgarh and the erection on its site of the citadel now known as Akbar's fort or the Agra Fort.......The razing of Badalgarh is popularly attributed to the damage done to it by a powder magazine in 1554, but as it was subsequently occupied by Ibrahim Khan Sur, Sikandar Shah Sur, Humayun, Himu and by Akbar himself, the actual reason for its demolition must have been the emperor's desire to have a citadel entirely of his own making."

The above passage is a typical instance of the many myths deftly implanted in Indian historical narratives. One wonders how historians placed implicit faith in them when even a lay man would not fail to see the many fallacies inherent in the assertion. Firstly, a powder magazine blast would damage only a portion of the fort, if at all. Secondly, even that explosion is fictitious since successive monarchs are shown to have used the fort without feeling insecure. Thirdly, Akbar, engaged in incessant warfare, would not be so foolish as to demolish a good fort just for the fun and thrill of it. Fourthly, just before him false claims of authorship of the fort or a part of it had been made on behalf of Sikandar Lodi and Jalal Khan, and therefore it is no wonder if the same deceitful feat has been repeated in Akbar's favour. Fifthly, the Badalgarh claimed to have been built and rebuilt by successive Muslim monarchs is still entirely of the Hindu style and its gates bear Hindu names like "Amar Singh Gate" and "Hathipal Gate."

As Keene further observes on page 14 of his book "It is significant that the damaged condition of Badalgarh is not

mentioned by the Emperor Jahangir in his memoirs ; in these he simply states that before his birth in 1570 his father Akbar 'had an old fort on the bank of the Jumna' levelled to the ground and then 'built on its site a fort of red sandstone so magnificent......' Various dates are assigned to the commencement of the fort......Authorities differ widely regarding the time expended in building the fort." It must be mentioned here that anything mentioned in the Jahangirnama deserves to be disbelieved in the first instance unless corroborated by independent evidence. Sir H. M. Elliot and Prof. John Dowson have in their critical study of the *Jahangirnama* time and again disputed the many fanciful claims made therein. When Jahangir reaches Lahore he says "I entered the fort of Lahore which was built by my father." It is such baseless statements nonchalantly planted in Muslim chronicles at random that have vitiated Indian historical narratives. On page 171 Keene very wisely observes that "Indian historians, in attempting to belaud the acts of their kingly patrons, have often committed themselves to statements which under the searchlight of subsequent scrutiny, are found to be absolutely inaccurate." In spite of such repeated warnings our historians have hardly ever cared to focus the "searchlight of scrutiny" on even suspicious claims.

There is another very revealing footnote on page 15 of Keene's book with regard to Agra Fort. The footnote says "According to Tabakat-i-Akbari, Azam Khan was murdered in 1566, but even so Badalgarh and not Akbar's fort must have witnessed the tragedy, for as the creation of the latter was certainly not commenced earlier than 1565, not even the foundations of its walls could have been completed in 1566" and yet the assassin Adam Khan was "hurled from the terrace."

This clinches the issue. It shows that the fort was never demolished and rebuilt as falsely claimed by Muslim chroniclers. Agra fort as it exists today is in fact the ancient Rajput citadel of Badalgarh. Since the Delhi Red Fort is a twin of the Agra fort the former is also equally ancient and of Rajput authorship.

This point about the Agra fort has been dealt with at some length here in order to prove to the hilt my contention how utterly baseless, dishonest and deceitful claims have been wantonly made in Muslim chronicles. This realization should help us in subjecting the traditional legend of a so-called disconsolate Shahjahan having built a glittering palace (that is exactly what the term "Taj Mahal" means) over the dead body of one of his numerous consorts, to dispassionate scrutiny.

The so-called "Lady of the Taj"

It would now be pertinent to inquire who this so-called "Lady of the Taj" was ; what was her status in Shahjahan's household ; what was her ancestry and how much was her worth in Shahjahan's eyes ?

Maulvi Moinuddin Ahmad's book *The Taj and Its Environments* gives an account of this lady on page three. He says that her original name was Arjumand Bano Begam entitled Mumtaj Mahal. She was the grand daughter of Mirza Ghias Beg the Prime Minister of Jahangir, and one of his fathers-in-law. It needs to be pointed out here that this Ghias Beg was a mere waiter in the Persian court raised to prime ministership in the Moghul court because his beautiful and influential daughter happened to become Jahangir's mistress. Thus his grand daughter Mumtaz Mahal alias Arjumand Bano Begam was a commoner by birth.

Arjumand Bano's father was Khwaja Abul Hasan (also known as Yamin-ud-Daula Asaf Khan) and mother, Diwanji Begum. Born in 1594 A.D. Mumtaz was married to Shahjahan in 1612. She was therefore 16 while Shahjahan was 21 years of age at the time of their marriage. But she was not Shahjahan's first wife. Shahjahan's first wife, the queen was a great grand daughter of the ruler of Persia—Shah Ismail Safwi. Shahjahan had numerous other wives and thousands of consorts. He not only was married before taking Mumtaz as his wife but also married again after her death. In between these weddings he also used to take consorts by the hundreds into his harem. It is therefore futile to argue as is traditionally done, that Shahjahan was so devoted to Mumtaz as to lose all interest in life after her death and that he, therefore, perpetuated her memory in a magnificent monument.

The traditional myth of Shahjahan's disconsolate grief for Mumtaz is a typical instance of arguing backwards which is fallacious. The myth arose from the belief that Shahjahan was the builder of a grand tomb called the Taj Mahal. To prop up and sustain that falsehood other myths were hoisted. But between themselves the myths are mutually contradictory and inconsistent as all falsehoods are bound to be. These will be exposed in the course of this narrative in the proper context. The myth sought to be pricked here is about Shahjahan's special and exclusive attachment to Mumtaz as to justify raising an out-of-the-world monument in her memory. Had he been so attached there would have been a mention about it in histories. But there is not a word said about it anywhere. The only special romance, if any, mentioned in narratives of the Moghul court, relates to Jahangir and his consort Nurjahan. As regards Shahjahan, tra dition first starts from a false premise namely that he built the Taj Mahal as a

tomb. Then to explain it away—*i.e.*, justify the huge expense incurred on it, and its beauty—it is presumed that he must have been greatly attached to her. This is what I mean by "arguing backwards."

During the 18 years of her married life (for Mumtaz died in 1630) she bore 14 children (eight sons and six daughters) of whom seven survived her. That means in no single year was she free from pregnancy which shows Shahjahan's utter disregard for his wife's health, so much so that Mumtaz died soon after her last delivery. She was then only 34 years old.

Since she died at Burhanpur her body was buried there. Had Shahjahan really cared he could have built a monument where his wife was first buried. He did not do so because there was no ready monument available.

Six months later the body was exhumed, which was a sacrilege and violation of the tenets of Islam, to be taken to Agra. As a matter of fact if the Taj Mahal took 17 years or so to build according to traditional fiction why was the body carried to Agra from the original place of burial within six months of the death ? What was the hurry ?

Another interesting fact is that even in the precincts of the Taj the body was again interred in a temporary grave for another six months. Thereafter it was laid where it is supposed to lie now. These are very important facts which need to be carefully examined. Had the Taj been really built by Shahjahan over a period of 17 years employing 20,000 labourers one can imagine the heaps of building material lying all around with the large labour force wandering all over. Under such circumstances would it be possible to keep the body of a dead queen right there underneath to be trodden

over by an army of humble labourers, in the dust and din of a huge project ?

In my view the rational explanation is that soon after Mumtaz's death she was buried in Burhanpur—the town in which she died. Six months later when Shahjahan visualized the possibility of ousting Jaisingh from his resplendent hereditary palace, using the death of his wife as a lever, he kept exerting his royal pressure in talking Jaisingh out of his luxurious ancestral home. Since Jaisingh could not be so easily prevailed upon, Shahjahan had the body of Mumtaz brought from Burhanpur to serve as a sort of an ultimatum. When the body itself was there as an handy asset for the emperor and the entire Muslim nobility to browbeat Jaisingh with could he hold out any longer ? He had to surrender his ancestral palace. Within a few months its central octagonal throne chamber was dug up. Two trenches were made in the basement, and Mumtaz's exhumed body was interred in one. Above the basement in the throne chamber two cenotaphs were raised so as to be directly above the graves in the basement. The other trench in the basement was for Shahjahan. The cenotaph above his trench could have been completed even with that of Mumtaz because after Shahjahan's death he could easily be buried in the open trench in the basement without disturbing the cenotaph above. This was necessary to ensure a grand burial for himself alongside Mumtaz when he knew that none of his sons cared for him two hoots. The cenotaphs had to be erected in the throne-chamber above the basement lest while the royal bodies lay underneath others would use the main upper chamber for temporal purposes thereby violating the sanctity

of the departed souls and the dignity of royalty, albeit deceased.

The main task of having the body buried in the throne chamber of Jaisingh's palace having been completed labourers, masons and artisans could take their own leisurely time in etching Koranic extracts on the exterior to satisfy Shahjahan's and his maulvis's conscience. Had this not been so Mumtaz's body would have been brought years later when Shahjahan completed the construction of the monument over an open plot of land as is alleged.

In spite of her own physical worries, or perhaps because of them—in having had to bear 14 children within 18 years of married life—Mumtaz had a sore temper. Living day and night in a fanatic atmosphere she was as zealous a bigot as her husband. Contemporary Jesuit records quoted heretofore bear witness that even a few days before her death she had goaded Shahjahan to take bitter revenge on defenceless Jesuits and conceivably on all non-Muslims, throughout her life. So even her nature was not of the type which would inspire any tender attachment in her spouse. On Shahjahan's part he was too conceited and bigoted to care for anybody except himself as has been shown above from contemporary testimony. There could be no attachment between two such persons except the purely physical, and that too only from Shahjahan unilaterally. And when it is only physical attachment who cares for the dead if there is a continuously replenished harem as Shahjahan had. Thus neither by lineage, nor by any endearing qualities, physical beauty, special attachment and precedence of rank (because she was not the first wife, not a queen in her own right) did Arjumand Bano Begum qualify for the distinction of a unique sepulchre.

Irregularly Placed Tombs

The two tombs in the Taj are irregularly placed. This is mentioned in Maulvi Moinuddin's book on page 54. He says "The two tombs are located rather irregularly, which was apparently due to an unforeseen necessity." What that unforeseen necessity was Moinuddin Ahmad is unable to explain. Obviously the two tombs had to be irregularly accommodated since the chamber was not initially made to the dimensions of two dead bodies but to serve as the throne chamber of a palace.

Had the cenotaph chamber been originally constructed to serve as a sepulchre the tombs would not have to be aligned irregularly.

Shahjahan Has Left No Record

The most surprising thing about the Taj is that Shahjahan has not left even a scrap of any written record about the construction of what is currently appraised as the most beautiful building in the world. It is incredible that a regime which orders such an expensive tomb to be built, costing millions of rupees, with its construction extending over 17 years—as is alleged—should not leave any written record about it, especially during those days when corruption was rampant.

Evidence about the absence of any record regarding the construction of the Taj is found on page 265 of the *History of the Shahjahan of Dihli* written by professor B. P. Saksena. That book is of special significance because it was accepted by the London University in the year 1931, for the award of a Ph.D. to its author. The introduction to the book has been written by Sir Wolsley Haig, K.C.S.I., G.C.I.E., etc. Prof. Saksena

states "Though there is a great unanimity among writers in the estimate of the beauty of the Taj, their opinions as to its origin and style differ widely. Sleeman in his *Rambles and Recollections* makes the fantastic suggestion of its having been designed by a French engineer Austin de Bourdeaux and by a ridiculous stretch of imagination identifies him with Ustad Isa. But the suggestion is not confirmed by historical evidence. V. Smith relying upon the testimony of Manrique, attributes the origin of the design to Germino Vironeo, a view which is rejected by Sir John Marshall and E.B. Havell on grounds of historical evidence and the internal proof of style provided by the building itself."

It is clear from the above passage that if Shahjahan had left any court record there was no need and there would have been no scope for the persons named above to indulge in any kite-flying. And anyone persisting in doing so could have been easily silenced by producing even one relevant document.

Prof. Saksena's repeated use of the term "historical evidence" is very misleading and intriguing. Obviously he has tried to browbeat the other authorities mentioned by him by using the term "historical evidence" without explaining what it is. The other persons mentioned by him could not have been oblivious of the evidence that Prof. Saksena may have had in view. In any case one thing is quite clear that the building itself, some wild claims made by rumour-mongering sycophant chroniclers, and the speculations of previous officials and writers has been all the material that these people have had in view. In the true Connandyle style they should have considered several other bits of evidence which have obviously escaped them.

The words "origin and style" used by Prof. Saksena must

be carefully noted. They show that there is not even a single non-controversial aspect of the Taj. In fact its very "origin" (as a tomb) is in doubt. Nothing can be truer than that. Consequently the guesses of the various persons mentioned above were bound to go wide off the mark when they started from wrong premises—namely the presumption that the Taj originated as a tomb, and that its construction was ordered by Shahjahan.

No One Knows the Cost of Taj Mahal

Shahjahan having got a ready palace to bury his consort in, it was but natural that the numerous guesses by different persons of its cost should run wild and range between a few thousand and billions of rupees.

What actually happened was that having obtained a ready palace all that Shahjahan had to do was to make some additions and alterations to convert it into a tomb. This obviously meant digging the graves, constructing cenotaphs and etching Koranic texts on the walls for the peace of the departed soul as well as to remove any possibility of the dispossessed owner ever trying to lay claim to his ancestral palace. Even these changes must have cost a sizeable amount and all the guesses relate to those expenses.

Even for those additions and alterations Shahjahan had to spend very little. He was too shrewd and too practical a monarch to spend his wealth on a comparatively infructuous and sentimental project like a tomb. In fact as an astute politician he used the occasion of Mumtaz's death to talk away a wealthy Rajput family out of its luxurious abode. Had there been no such possibility he would not have bothered to exhume Mumtaz's body from its grave in faraway Burhanpur to be brought all the way to Agra, six months after her death.

Again he would not have kept it lying in a temporary grave even at Agra for another six months. All this sacrilegious handling of a corpse was dictated by Shahjahan's desire to make political and communal capital out of it.

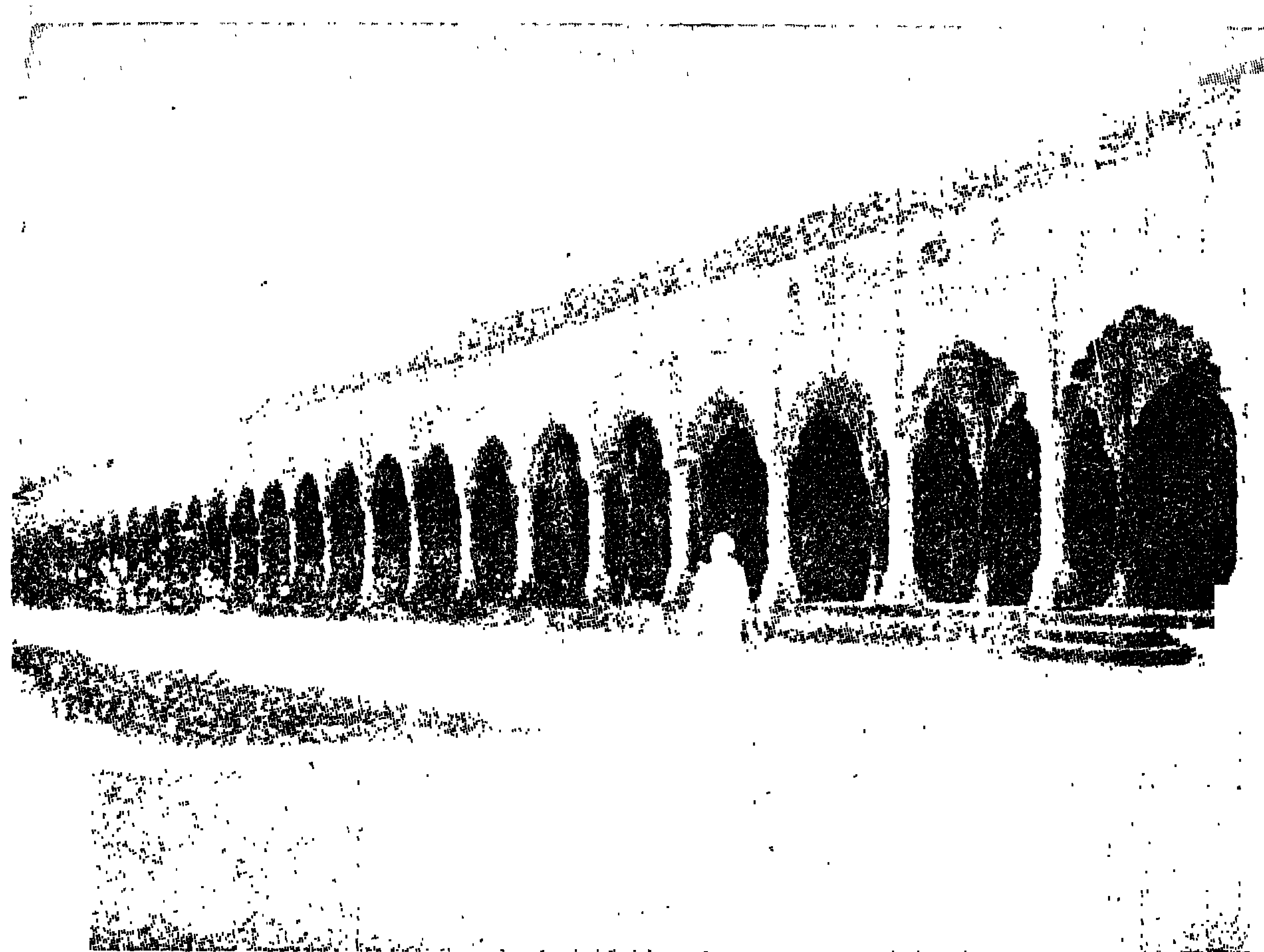
That Shahjahan was very reluctant in spending money even on the alterations is recorded in the *Guide to the Taj at Agra.* That book, which is a compilation, was printed at the Victoria Press by Azeezoodeen of Lahore. On page 14 of that book the author says "The labour was all forced, and very little payment made in cash to the 20,000 workmen who were said to have been employed for 17 years....(even) the allowance of corn was cruelly curtailed by rapacious officials placed over them."

Could so stingy a monarch ever launch a project like the Taj Mahal ? Could he hope to have 20,000 workmen sweat and toil for him for nothing over a period of 17 years. No wonder then that they worked desultorily, and the work proceeded at a snail's pace depending on the availability of even that meagre allowance of corn, and the availability of such workers as would be willing to slave day in and day out on those terms.

The above testimony proves that both psychologically and financially Shahjahan lacked the capability to launch a project like the Taj.

The Workmen Rebelled in Disgust

When 20,000 workmen are forced to toil on no cash wages but only meagre rations—even those being robbed by unscrupulous and hungry supervisors—the result is obvious. They rebelled. The despot for whom they worked hardly cared for their lives. He punished them by amputating their hands for the crime of demanding even a living wage. The



One of the many redstone crridors in the Taj premises all in the pure Rajput style. Along many more such corridors in the reception quadrangle at the back are scores of rooms forming part of the building complex surrounding the over 20-rooms marble palace suite of the Taj. The Taj premises accounted for several hundred rooms, towers, moats and many other features which add to a palace but not tomb.

hands were amputated obviously to teach them a lesson that they may be permanently incapacitated from earning a livelihood by practising their skill carefully cultivated over generations.

Maulvi Moinuddin Ahmad's book contains a significant passage on page 17. He says "Some European writers have made disparaging remarks in connection with the building of the Taj. It is said that the employees suffered badly. They were reduced to starvation, and subjected to harsh treatment."

Along with this evidence we must consider the traditional account, handed down from generation to generation, that Shahjahan had the hands of the workmen amputated. While the amputation seems to be a fact because the workmen were seething with discontentment, doting accounts have given that cruelty a daft romantic twist. Legend says that Shahjahan maimed the artisans after the completion of the Taj Mahal, in order that they may not build a comparable monument for anyone else.

No one seems to have analysed such silly legends and tried to search for the grain of truth, if any, in them. Could a monarch with such a highly cultivated aesthetic sense as to conceive and build the Taj, ever have the heart to treacherously bite away the hands which toiled for him ? Again, would a monarch disconsolate in his bereavement be so stone-hearted as to maim those who built a tomb for his beloved wife ? Obviously that explanation is a brazen-faced concoction. It is an attempt to shroud the fact of Shahjahan's cruelty in an aura of romantic nonsense. As we have seen, that cruelty arose from the fact that the workmen rebelled in disgust for being made to toil without adequate or even reasonable compensation.

We have already given heretofore sufficient evidence of Shahjahan's cruel nature. No aspect of his life is free from extreme selfishness and cruelty. It is not for nothing that all his sons contended for the throne even during his life time. He died a prisoner of his own son precisely because even as a father he could not be anything but cruel.

Incidentally Shahjahan's attempt to get the work done on meagre rations alone also lends weight to the conclusion that the contemplated work amounted to only additions and alterations to an existing building. No one could hope to build a magnificent mansion by providing a mere austere meal to the workers.

Another Inconsistent Legend

Another fantastic legend that has been dotingly handed down to us is that Shahjahan intended to build a black-marble Taj as his own tomb so that it could pair with the white marble Taj in which his wife's body had been laid to rest. In confirmation of this, guides, with an eye on the extra coin that gratified visitors would want to give them, point out to some plinth-high ruins on the other side of the river. Nobody seems to have ever bothered to verify whether the remains are the plinth of an intended tomb or that of a razed mansion, and, whether the plinth or the foundation conforms to the Taj Mahal pattern ? Such wild rumours, dotingly passed from generation to generation, have scared away researchers from doing any original thinking with regard to the origin of the Taj. A huge pile of rumourous debris that buries the truth about the Taj has created a suffocating atmosphere making it difficult for any researcher to think and breathe anew in respect of the origin of the Taj.

The legend that Shahjahan intended to build another black-marble tomb, is also inconsistent with the previously mentioned legend about having maimed the workmen. After having maimed the workmen with the avowed intention that they may not build another comparable monument how could Shahjahan hope to have a black-marble Taj. Apparently none of the previous researchers and so-called experts and authorities seem to have ever bothered to examine and expose the falsification of evidence from beginning to end with regard to every single aspect of the Taj Mahal. This psychological morbidity arises from the enormous amount of untruth that has been heaped high, pile over pile, around the origin of the Taj in order to conceal the fact that Shahjahan commandeered a Rajput palace to serve as a tomb. The mystery that surrounds the origin of the Taj amounts to pressure propaganda which has for 300 years successfully befooled the world and scared away any original research. The numerous bits of testimony produced in an attempt to establish the authenticity of the Taj as an original tomb do not fall into a pattern. They constitute an incongruous mass, one bit cancelling out the other, as has been explained above with regard to the two legends.

Magnificence of Taj is Unislamic

According to the tenets of Islam—which had the force of law during Shahjahan's times—the lavishness of the Taj as a tomb is a sacrilege. On page 57 of his book Maulvi Moinuddin Ahmad says "It is said that on his death-bed Shahjahan implored Aurangzeb to carry out the scheme he had in heart (to bury him in a monument which would pair with the Taj). But the latter was too strict a Muhammedan and too economical a ruler to spend public money on such purposes."

The words "he was too strict a Muhammedan" to countenance the proposal are noteworthy. They establish the fact that orthodoxy frowned on the sepulchre which looked as lavish as a palace. It is only to draw attention to those words that the above passage has been quoted. The rest of it is all trash and fits in with the heaps of "sweet nothings" that have been said about the Taj. But the passage underlines our conclusion that since the Taj was not an ordered tomb but a ready monument which came handy, no one raised any religious objection to burying Mumtaz in it. Moreover it satisfied another dictum that anything dispossessed from an 'heathen' and pressed into the service of Islam became per se sanctified.

Contemporary European Records

Protagonists of the traditional view about the authorship of the Taj are apt to bank on the testimony of contemporary European visitors to India citing them as independent and impartial witnesses. One such was Tavernier, a Frenchman. He has said in *Travels in India* (Vol. 1, p. 10) alluding to the Taj "I witnessed the commencement and accomplishment of this great work." Regarding the independence, impartiality and importance of the testimony of third parties like contemporary European visitors, I am in full agreement. But I only wish to point out that any piece of evidencc to be admissible, has to be closely examined from several angles. The first question is whether the visitor concerned has recorded the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, *i.e.* to say whether he was a man of unimpeachable honesty, and whether he was a meticulous recorder of events. Many of the foreign travel accounts would boggle at this first test.

Secondly, whether they had access to the sites and events about which they wrote, that is to say whether they have left us authoritative first-hand accounts or just romantic and engaging bazar gossip that they happened to hear during a hurried and haphazard tour. Many travel accounts are of this latter type. We know from experience that contemporary tourists, adventurers, hitch-hikers and sojourners write with an air of unwarranted authority. Obviously their accounts are meant for the information of their own countrymen at home. Compared to the people in the home country the visitor's glimpse of the host country is to some extent revealing. But his views regarding men, matters and events of the host country can hardly be regarded as worthy of notice in the country about which he writes. His appraisal may be amusing but not admissible. Thirdly, such testimony has to be correctly interpreted in the context of the visitor's character, limitations, choice of words, meticulousness, indefatigability, resourcefulness, the time that elapsed between the event he describes and his recording it on paper, his predilections etc.

Keeping the above observations in view when we attempt an evaluation of the French trader Tavernier's account one cannot help observing that what he means by the "great work" is obviously the transformation of a Rajput palace into a Muslim tomb. Even that was a stupendous task. It involved considerable demolition, erection of a network of complicated scaffolding, ordering of stone and other building material, employing an army of skilled craftsmen, stonemasons and Koranic scholars to select and prescribe the Koranic extracts that had to be engraved along the arches. The central

portion of the rich mosaic floor of the throne chamber of the erstwhile palace had to be ripped open for the erection of two cenotaphs to be in position above the tomb in the basement. When a foreign tradesman like Tavernier sees all this activity what other words could he use except "the commencement and accomplishment of this great work." That testimony, therefore, does not make even the slightest dent in the view that the Taj Mahal originated as a palace and was subsequently converted into a tomb.

It might be pertinently asked by proponents of the traditional view that if Jaisingh was ousted from his hereditary palace to convert it into a tomb how has such a fact gone unrecorded ? There can be several explanations. Jaisingh could have been prevailed upon under duresss to sign away the palace. Or he may have been given something as a sop in exchange, like a high-sounding title or a higher rank in court. In such a case the transaction having had the trappings of normality did not evoke any special comment. Even if it was a straight dispossession such flagrant usurpations had continued ever since the days of Alaptagin and Sabuktagin. Being an everyday occurrence such usurpation raised no eyebrows. Instead the dispossessed person had to consider himself lucky if he was at least spared his life. Besides, use of Rajput palaces for tombs had been an ordinary practice. Rulers like Iltmash, Allauddin Khilji, the Lodis, Humayun, Akbar and even courtiers like Khan Khanan, Najafkhan and saints like Salim Chisti lie buried in erstwhile Rajput mansions. What is a prevailing common practice naturally evokes no mention. It was a matter of right and privilege for the alien Muslim rulers to use the mansions of the defeated

Rajputs both for their living and the dead, as they pleased or as the exigencies of the times required. There could be no questioning or explanations about it.

Estimates of the Cost

The confusion and contradiction that prevails regarding every aspect of the Taj also extends to estimates of its cost. Had the Taj Mahal been really built by Shahjahan from start to finish there would have been no need for wild guesses on the part of the researchers. The cost should have been a mere matter of record. After all Shahjahan's reign is believed to be a golden period characterized by peace, prosperity and encouragement to art. Could it be possible then that in such a reign no records would be maintained of such a lavish, stupendous and important project as the queen's own tomb ?

Keene's Handbook states on page 154 that "the exact amount spent on building the Taj is nowhere recorded and the data available for even an approximate estimate is so meagre and complex that the guesses hitherto made range. from £500,000 to £5000,000. The Diwan-i-Afridi, another historical work, estimates it to be Rs. 9 crores and 17 lakhs. On the other hand Mr. Bayard Taylor, an American who visited Agra in 1853 A.D. wrote in the *New York Tribune* : "A Sheikh who takes care of the Taj told me that the Taj with its other buildings cost seven crore rupees. This is however quite impossible. I believe the real cost is estimated at £1,750,000 which does not seem exaggerated." The *Maharashtriya Dnyankosh* (Maharashtra Encyclopaedia edited and published by Dr. S. V. Ketkar) in its Volume 15, page (T) 36 records the cost to be five million rupees. *The Guide to the Taj at Agra* on page 14 records that "The native account of the cost

of the Taj gives Rs. 98,55,426 as having been given by the Rajas and Nawabs ; and out of the emperor's private treasury Rs. 86,09,760, which would give £1,846,518,6 or nearly two million." So here again we find that Shahjahan having never built the Taj people have been indulging in wild guesses about its cost on a false presumption. Obviously what has happened is that the Taj having been remodelled from a Rajput palace to the semblance of a Muslim tomb, and Shahjahan's stingy nature not being prepared to spend much cash the work had to proceed very slowly spread over a number of years. As recorded by *The Guide to the Taj at Agra*, above, Shahjahan even seems to have coerced subservient rulers into contributing towards the remodelling cost. Incidentally this gives a lie to the assertion that Shahjahan's reign was a period of peace, plenty and prosperity. To borrow the common man's idiom he could hardly make both ends meet. The different estimates have naturally varied because some in their wild partiality and enthusiasm added the cost of the original Rajput palace to the remodelling charges, others confined themselves only to the cash paid as wages and cost of material involved in the alterations, some others included the cost of the rations given to the workmen. Many estimates perhaps include the amounts obtained from a few Rajas and Nawabs, while other accounts took into consideration only the amount spent from Shahjahan's treasury. Some interested parties having found the amount spent by Shahjahan too paltry to justify the grandeur of the monument inflated the amount to legendary figures.

Sleeman in his *Rambles and Recollections of an Indian Official* asserts on page 54 that "The mausoleum and.....all the bnildings cost Rs. 3,17,48,026."

The *Illustrated Weekly of India* (Published by Bennett Coleman & Co., Bombay) in its issue dated September 20, 1964 mentions the cost of the Taj to be Rs. 4 crores.

Thus even the search for the actual cost of the Taj ends up in the smoke of wild guesswork which proves that Shahjahan never undertook the construction of the Taj as an original monument.

Construction Period Bluff

There is no unanimity either about the period during which the Taj Mahal was constructed. Tavernier, a French merchant who visited India during Shahjahan's reign, has recorded in Vol. 1, p. 10 of his *Travels in India* that "I witnessed the commencement and accomplishment of this great work." According to *Maharashtriya Dnyankosh* (Maharashtra Encyclopaedia edited and published by Dr. S.V. Ketkar) Vol. 14, p. (T) 3 Tavernier remained in India from 1641 to 1668. That leads to the conclusion that the construction of the Taj was "commenced" sometime after 1641. But Mumtaz had died in 1630. And according to *The Guide to the Taj at Agra* (p. 15) the building which took 17 years to build was begun within a year of Mumtaz's death.

The confusion regarding the period of construction of the Taj Mahal as alleged by proponents of the Taj legend, is further confounded by yet another version. The Maharashtriya Dnyankosha Vol. 15, page (T) 36 states that the construction of the Taj Mahal was begun in the beginning of 1631 A.D. and completed by 1643 January. This gives a 12-year period as against the 17 years mentioned in Keene's book. From Tavernier's assertion that he saw the beginning and end of the construction during his stay in India we get quite a different

period because Tavernier was in India from 1641 to 1668 A.D. When Mumtaz had died in Burhanpur in 1630, and her body had been removed to Agra within six months of her death, to be interred in the Taj how could it be, if Tavernier is to be believed, that the construction was started sometime after 1641 *i.e.* after at least about 11 years of Mumtaz's demise. Thus from whatever angle we try to probe the traditional version of the building of the Taj it gets curiouser and curiouser.

On page 165 of *Keene's Handlook* it is stated that "it is highly probable that the remains of Mumtaz Mahal lay in the temporary tomb near the Masjid Baoli for about nine years. When they were finally removed to this (basement marble) tomb is not known." This is yet another discordant note in the construction period bluff, making the confusion worse confounded.

So even with respect to the period during which the Taj Mahal was built traditional accounts are all at variance with one another since they are without foundation.

Designer and Artisans Unknown

Characteristic of the bluff and bluster of the Taj legend is the hopeless disagreement among researchers about the designer and artisans who made the Taj Mahal.

On page 151 *Keeen's Handbook* emphasizes that "even though Abdul Hamid Lahori was specially instructed by Shahjahan to write the history of the Taj in the Badshahnama, his silence regarding a designer is significant." This is a very important fact which must not be lost sight of. That Shahjahan's official chronicler should not record the name of the designer of the world's best monument attributed to Shahjahan, is a crucial clue. It proves that the names of the Taj designer

variously given are all figments of the imagination. In this game of the blind man's buff both Indian and foreign scholars have freely and merrily participated.

Keene's observation that "Abdul Hamid was specially instructed by Shahjahan to write the history of the Taj in the *Badshahnama*" is very revealing. Since the Taj is a wonder monument had Shahjahan been its real author. Abdul Hamid should have automatically credited it to Shahjahan. The very fact that Shahjahan felt the need to order its inclusion in Abdul Hamid's chronicle clearly shows that his claim to the authorship of the Taj is fictitious. That even under orders to include the 'history' (?) of the Taj Abdul Hamid should still fail to record the name of its designer clearly shows that the Taj Mahal existed much before Shahjahan. How else could Abdul Hamid fail to mention the name of the master designer whose versatile genius created the Taj, in his chronicle.

On page 152 *Keene's Handbook* says "The names of the principal experts employed, headed by Mohammad Isa Afandi are given in a Persion manuscript entitled the *Tarikh-i-Taj Mahal* possessed by the Khadims or hereditary custodians of the Taj. The authenticity of this document is somewhat questionable."

On page 18 Maulvi Moinuddin's book confesses "There are various traditions as to the original designer of the plan. Some European historians credit it to Geronimo Veroneo, on the strength of a statement by Father Manrique of Spain who visited Agra in 1641."

On page 24 of the same book it is stated that "the design eventually accepted was by Ustad Isa who is stated to be a

Byzantine Turk in one account and a native of Shiraz in Persia in another. This discrepancy even about the nationality of Isa is bound to exist when the name was fictitiously grafted from among the names familiar in Shahjahan's court. And since there could be many Isas subsequent accounts wondered whether the Isa mentioned was a Turk or Persian.

On page 25 of his book Maulvi Moinuddin records that "There are others who believe that the mosaic work of the Taj was executed by a French artist named Austin-de-Bourdeaux."

In Vol. III of *The 19th Cenntury and After* (a monthly review edited by James Knowles) is an article entitled *The Taj and Its Designers* by E.B. Havell. On page 1043 of it the author asserts that "The Taj plan follows closely that of Humayun's tomb (built by Akbar nearly a century earlier)." This introduces an altogether new element in the fictitious accounts of the designers of the Taj. Because it virtually concedes that the Taj design far from being anybody's original concept, is almost a copy of a monument already existing in India a century earlier at least.

Here I want to make some important observation of my own. In the research Paper I read at the Indian History Congress session held at Poona (December 27 to 29), in 1963 I had led evidence to show that the Humayun tomb is no original tomb but a Rajput palace converted into a tomb. Havell's observation lends strength to my contention. The Taj, by whomsoever it had been modelled, is patterned after the Humayun tomb. It follows therefore that whether the Taj preceded the so-called Humayun tomb building, or *vice versa*, both are Rajput palaces dating back to pre-Muslim times.

I am of course going to lead other independent evidence during the course of this narrative but it is pertinent to point out here that the similarity of design of the Taj and the so-called Humayun tomb is apparent to many. Consistent with that my contention has all along been that both originated as Rajpnt palaces. What is more both, in my view, belong to one and the same family—the ancestors of the present ruler of Jaipur That dynasty was among the most powerful Rajput families during Moghul rule. Humayun tomb in Delhi is even today a part of what is known as the "Jaipur Estate". Similarly all scholars and chroniclers who differ hopelessly on every other aspect of the origin and construction of the Taj are unanimous on one point that the Taj grounds belonged to Jaisingh the ancestor of the present ruler of Jaipur, who was a contemporary of Shahjahan. It is, therefore, clear that both these magnificent monuments, belonging to the Jaipur royal family, bearing innumerable Hindu motifs, and other adjuncts of sumptuous palaces were later taken over for use as Muslim tombs. The motive obviously was to strip the indigenous ruling families of their wealth, importance, and resources so as to sap their strength and demoralise the local population. All invaders in history have that outlook Among Muslim invaders it had always been more pronounced.

The Maharashtriya Dnyankosha (Maharashtra Encyclopaedia), Vol. 15, P. (T) 36 lists altogether different names : Amanatkhan Shirazee, Ismailkhan Rumi etc.

Prof. B.P. Saksena's *History of the Shahjahan of Dihli* strikes another discordent note. He confesses that "Though there is a great unanimity among writers in the estimate of the beauty of the Taj their opinions as to its origin and style differ

widely. Sleeman in his *Rambles and Recollections* makes the fantastic suggestion of its having been designed by a French engineer Austin-de-Bourdeaux and by a ridiculous stretch of imagination identifies him with Ustad Isa. But the suggestion is not confirmed by historical evidence. V. Smith relying on the testimony of Manrique, attributes the origin of the design to Germino Vironeo, a view which is rejected by Sir John Marshall and E B. Havell on grounds of historical evidence and the internal proof of style provided by the building itself."

The above passage is a pitiful confession of how all these various important people holding positions of authority, and therefore implicity believed in by the lay public for correct historical judgment have miserably failed to detect the utter hollowness of the Taj legend.

The Patchwork Style of the Taj

Like every other aspect of the Taj even the very protagonists of the so-called Indo-Saracenic theory of architecture display complete disarray and extreme bewilderment in the appraisal of what they call the style of the Taj. In the passage from Prof. Saksena's book quoted above he has clearly stated that all the so-called authorities differ widely in their opinions about both the origin and the style of the Taj. This was inevitable since what was basically a Hindu palace was tinkered with and improvised, to have some semblance of a tomb. Naturally those oblivious of this basic fact who try to appraise it as an original tomb are bound to be baffled.

The Guide to the Taj at Agra makes a disarming confession in this respect on page 14. The author says "As to the style of architecture I should be diffident in giving an opinion!

Certain it is I have never seen any like it either in Italy, Turkey or Spain." This writer has obviously displayed more intellectual honesty and scholarly patience than others who rushed to express an opinion with nothing to base their conclusions on except official airs. Such hotch potch that has resulted from the conversion of a Hindu palace into a Muslim tomb could obviously have few parallels elsewhere. It is to be hoped that students of history and architecture would at least now open their eyes wide, and have a second look at the Taj and the so-called other tombs and mosques for some second thoughts.

Contagion of Blunder Has Affected Architectural Text Books

It is a pity that misleading appraisals of mediaeval monuments in India, have not only vitiated current text books of Indian history but have also burdened text books of the history of architecture with blundering concepts. Students of architecture in India now mechanically repeat parrot-like so-called traits of Hindu architecture, Muslim architecture and Indo-Saracenic architecture without realising that they have been grossly misled. They must now realise that all important monuments in India that survive from mediaeval times are Hindu buildings with some plastering and engravings and such other alterations done by Muslim conquerors. The sooner it is realised that not a single Muslim ruler in India ever constructed even a single road, dig any channel, sink any well or build any palace, fort or mosque, the better it would be for a correct and truthful study of Indian history. The puerile faith placed by so-called scholars and experts in traditional assertions, even in the face of glaring inconsistencies and contradictions, amounts to a pathetic disregard of all

rules of caution and worldly wisdom that one is expected to observe even in ordinary day-to-day affairs.

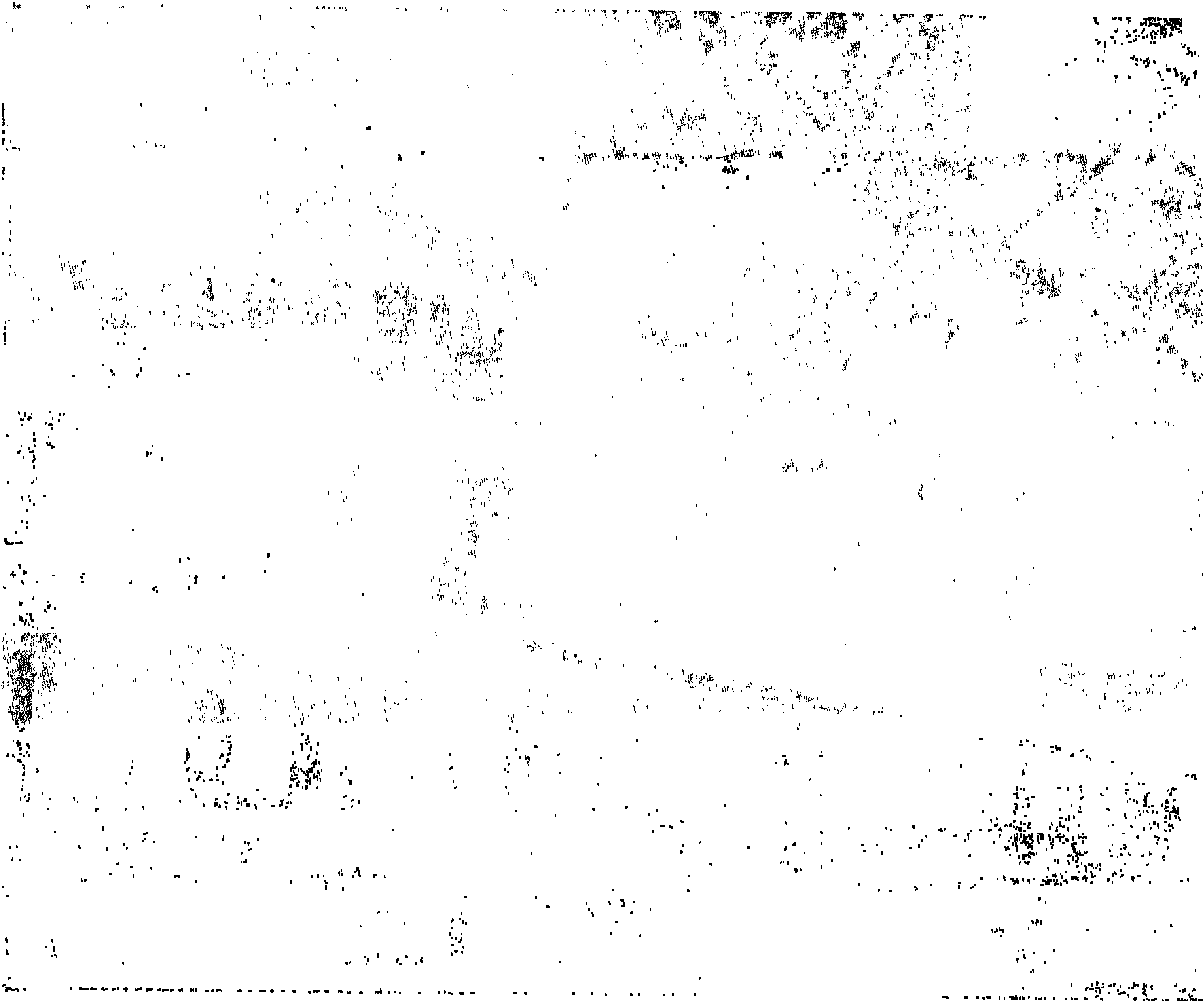
Dimensions of the Taj are those of a Palace

The precincts of the Taj known as Jaisinghpura and Khawaspura encompassed numerous buildings. The area around the Taj teemed with multi-storeyed buildings providing living accommodation for guards, army detachments, stewards, waiters, caterers, ushers and other parafernalia which waits on royalty. There were, therefore, in that area a bazar, serais, guest houses and roads connecting all these.

The dimensions of the Taj, and its get up are those of a wealthy palace, and not of a sombre tomb. In support of my view I am quoting hereunder at some length extracts from Maulvi Moinuddin's book : "In front of the magnificent gate there is a spacious platform, 211½ ft. in length and 86¼ ft. in width......The plot encompassed by the four walls is a rectangle 1860 ft. long north and south, and 1,000 ft. broad east and west, with a total area of 2,07,000 sq. yds. or a little more than 42 acres. The gate is 100 ft. high.

"The entrance is 10½ ft. wide. The gate is made of an alloy composed of eight different metals, and is studded with brass nails hammered in. The area inside is an irregular octagon with a diagonal 41½ ft."

Here I want to point out that the octagonal shape is a specifically traditional Hindu shape. The octagonal design is often drawn in stone powder in front of entrances to Hindu homes. Hand fans in ancient times used to be of octagonal shape. Paper lamps hung during the Diwali festival are of an octagonal shape.



The multistoreyed redstone tower at the left is one of many in the Taj premises. Entirely Rajput in style the towers prove that the Taj was a palace. A tomb does not need such towers. On either side of the arched top of the ground floor windows may be faintly seen the round discs typical of Rajput sculpture. To the right of the tower-base behind the man may be seen a basement gateway opening on the Yamuna bank. Only a palace needs such huge basements containing scores of rooms and exits to the river bank. On the left (not seen) is a moat—yet another proof that the Taj originated as a palace.

Special metal alloys were known only to and manufactured only by Hindu smiths as is evident from the famous iron pillar in Delhi, the shaft lying in Dhar, and a number of other instances.

A tomb is open to fakirs and the poor all the 24 hours and, therefore, needs no doors studded with nails. Only a palace or fort door has polished brass nails hammered in for strengthening the entrance against possible intrusion.

The Maulvi further says "a flight of 17 steps takes one to the second storey. Going up 17 steps higher, we reach the 3rd storey containing four apartments. The apartments communicate with one another by a gallery running through. At the corners of this storey there are octagonal rooms, each with four doorways and one entrance to the staircase going up.

"Of the four staircases two go down to the first floor, the other two are closed (halfway through).

"Rooms at the southwestern corner have a through passage, while in the northeastern rooms the stairs are interrupted midway. A gallery affords communication between the different rooms ; each passage has a branch leading to the staircase.

"A flight of stairs consisting of 34 steps brings us to the very top. Here there are four towers at the corners each containing eight doorways. The towers are crowned with cupolas topped with brass kalases."

The last word "kalases" above should be noted. This word is repeated many times in Maulvi Moinuddin's description of the Taj. The word is from Sanskrit. It could never get into Taj premises, especially in a Muslim narrative

of the Taj unless it has been hovering in the Taj premises by pre-Muslim Rajput tradition. "Kalas" signifies a shining pinnacle usually of brass or gold. The repeated use of the word "kalas" also proves that the monument is a pre-Muslim palace. The word "kalas" only occurs in connection with towering and magnificent temples, palaces and such other monuments.

It must also be noted that the four cupolas nestling around the dome are of pure Rajput shape. Those capping the four towers at the corners of the Taj Mahal's open verandah are also of an entirely Rajput design.

What about the dome it may be asked ? The presumption that the dome is a Muslim invention is baseless. To call the dome a Muslim creation amounts to linking it somehow with Prophet Mohammad's birth. What possible connection could there be between the dome as an architectural design, and the origin of Islam. It is a historical fact that the dome over the Kaba—the central shrine of Islam—in Arabia, is itself of pre-Muslim origin. That the Kaba shrine before capture housed 360 divine images is not only admitted but flaunted in the history of Islam. The images were of Indian design is apparent from several clues. The Hindu practice of perambulating around a deity is still practised by Muslim pilgrims converging in Mecca. "Arvasthan" the original name of Arabia, signifies a land of horses—such as Arabia is. "Makayam Vishnu Padam" assertion in a Sanskrit Purana, is evidence of the fact that Mecca contained a Vishnu temple. The word Mecca itself is a corruption of the Sanskrit word "Makha" meaning sacrificial fire since in those days Indian fire worship was practised all over the Middle East. Many such signs of the

erstwhile Indian culture prevailing in Arabia could be pointed out. This is just to prove that the dome design was taught and introduced to West Asia when Islam had not even been heard of. It is therefore highly unjust and anachronistic for students of history and architecture to run away with the presumption that the dome is a Muslim concept. They should at least hence forward jettison this misleading belief. For God and king a dome signified all-round power and authority. It was, therefore, customary in ancient times to cap a palace or temple with a dome. The temple had domes as well as tall spires pointing to the heavenly abode of God. It is, therefore, that numerous temples have some front pavilions capped by domes, each dome at the rear looming higher than its predecessor, while the rearmost pavilion usually enclosing the sanctuary has a spire ending in a shining pinnacle and flag. No one, therefore, need have any lingering doubts about any Muslim influence in the Taj looking at the dome.

The dome is also a concave canopy over a convex deity namely the Shiva emblem. Looking up at the ceiling of Shiva temples one invariably can see the concave shape from the centre of which hangs a bell or leaking water pitcher to drip water on the deity.

Referring to some 14 basement rooms around the royal graves Maulvi Moinuddin says on page 37 of his book "The last two rooms have apertures peeping on to the placid stream...It was these openings that brought to light the existence of the long hidden chambers. The mouths of the staircases were shut up with stone slabs. It is hard to find out why these underground chambers were built..."

That even a Muslim like the Maulvi is hard put to explain why the underground chambers exist in a sepulchre shows

how the whole Taj legend is made up of incongruent bits. In a palace any number of underground chambers are not only of immense use but are indispensable. Such chambers in a palace are used to keep treasure, hide friends, imprison enemies, aud for secret talks. In a tomb basement chambers are redundant.

The very fact that those chambers have been filled up with sand and rendered unoccupiable is further proof that once the monument was converted into a tomb Shahjahan did not want visitors or caretakers to use the premises for residential purposes. Superfluous rooms of the erstwhile palace had therefore to be filled up.

On the same page the author Maulvi Moinuddin further observes "From the existence of the sand, apparently of the Jumna, lying thickly on the floor it might be reasonably supposed that there was a ghat or landing place on the spot, which however was disused subsequently for some unknown reason. The real object of building them remains then a mystery."

Many a such feature is bound to be a "mystery" to those who study the Taj Mahal in the mistaken belief that it originated as a tomb. The entire mystery clears up into a remarkably coherent mass of meticulous detail the moment it is realised that the Taj Mahal originated as a Rajput palace perhaps several centuries before Shahjahan took it into his head to convert it into a tomb.

On page 38 the Maulvi says "To the west of these chambers is a mosque which has room for a congregation of 539 souls." We wonder what significance, if any, attaches to the figure 539. This again shows that the guard room

flanking the throne chamber of the palace is today pointed out as a mosque. Had it been a mosque it would have provided accommodation for a round figure of persons, like 1,000 or 10,000, not the odd-random figure 539.

The four marble towers at the four corners of the open verandah of the Taj Mahal were both the watch towers of the Hindu palace, as well as lamp towers. At night the brightly illuminated palace used to appear "framed" in those four towers bearing their lights high up in the dark sky.

Blind adherents of the Indo-Saracenic theory of architecture seem to be unaware that towers starting at ground or plinth level like chimneys of brick-kilns, are a speciality of indigenous ancient Indian architecture. Saracenic minarets begin from the shoulders of buildings as they do in mosques. And usually such minarets are not hollow from within and have no stairs. This is one of the grounds, among other voluminous evidence, which disproves traditional Muslim claims to the authorship of the so-called Kutub Minar and the four towers of the Taj Mahal.

Marking every plinth, connected with service to God, the king or the public, with four towers is a universal ancient Indian custom. The square altar on which the deity is installed for Satyanarayan worship, has four banana plant stumps raised at the four corners, The wedding altar has piles of earthen pitchers forming tapering pillars at the four corners. Just about 125 miles by motorable road from Delhi is Pilani, a town in Rajasthan. There every public well has got a large square or rectangular plinth around it. At the four corners of the plinth are invariably found four pillars. This should be enough proof that public wells, palaces and altars used to be

set off with four pillars marking the four corners of their area. The same practice followed in the Taj Mahal is yet another proof of its Rajput authorship dating from pre-Muslim times.

While the building on one flank of the Taj is called a mosque, that on the opposite side is justified as a useless, inexplicable symmetrical adjunct termed by the non-descript word "Jawab" meaning "reply". Thus, hard put to explain away the various parts of the Taj, fantastic explanations have been piled one over the other without any consideration to their mutual consistency or balance with the result that at the least prodding its several links fall apart.

Continuing his survey of the Taj precincts, on page 39, Maulvi Moinuddin Ahmad says in his book "adjacent to the back wall of the mosque...is the Basai tower." He is at a loss to explain its significance or purpose. The word Basai derives from a Sanskrit root signifying residence. There are many ancient towns in India, called Basai. When the Taj Mahal is known to have originated as a Rajput palace several centuries before Shahjahan, the Basai tower is easily explained as a palace adjunct.

Moinuddin states on page 50 of his book that "according to the Badshahnama the enclosure (in which the two cenotaphs are located) was completed in 10 years at a cost of Rs. 50,000...It had a door of Jasper, costing Rs. 10,000."

Obviously a tomb usually frequented by fakirs and mendicants does not need to have a jasper door. Such rich and expensive doors are meant for living monarchs not for dead bodies.

About other buildings in the precincts Maulvi Moinuddin's book says on page 64 "The place between the chief gate of the mausoleum and the grand portal was known as Jilo Khana ...A great portion of the splended buildings that formed once a valuable appendage to the Taj, has fallen down...The area enclosed within the four walls of the Jilo Khana was occupied by 128 rooms...of which only 76 remain...Near the garden wall there are two Khawaspuras (or enclosed compounds) each containing 32 rooms with as many vestibules for the attendants. (At present the Western "Pura" is filled with flower pots. Half of the other "Pura" is occupied by a cowstable.)"

The above statement needs to be carefully examined. It gives a very clear indication that the Taj precincts consisted of numerous buildings three or four stories high consisting of hundreds of rooms. Accommodation on such a grand scale encompassing several hundred rooms is never part of a tomb but is always a necessity when the central building is a palace.

The suffix "pura" is a definite hangover of the times when the Rajputs occupied the Taj Mahal, because "pura" in Sanskrit signifies a busy locality but not the weird silence of a graveyard.

Even the syllable "Khawas" forming part of the word "Khawaspura" has a Rajput significance since "Khawas" were children of Rajput rulers from unwedded consorts. The very fact that the annexes of the Taj form part of Khawaspura proves that while the Rajput ruler lived in the centrally situated Taj Mahal his dependent children lived in the annexes.

The Guide to the Taj at Agra states on page 14 "There are said to have been two silver doors at the entrance to the Taj..."

On page 21 Maulvi Moinuddin's book mentions that "The solid gold rail around the tomb (afterwards replaced by a network of marble) was already completed by 1632, and Shahjahan had founded a suburb to provide a revenue for the upkeep of the mausoleum and had caused hills to be made level because they might not hinder the prospect of it... These details are of special interest, as we have no other account of the Taj by an English traveller at this date."

Incidentally the "hills" referred to above were put up for defence of the Taj Palace by its Rajput builders. Some of these "hills" still exist near the Taj approach.

A critical study of the above passages is revealing. One talks of silver doors and the other of a gold railing enclosing the area where the tombs are situated. Had these fixtures been installed by Shahjahan there is no reason or record as to why and by whom they were removed.

Silver doors and gold railings are fixtures of palaces, not of tombs. To believe that Shahjahan allowed these fixtures to be installed in the graveyard of his wife while he had nothing approaching them in his own palace is absurd in the extreme. It also shows crass ignorance of Shahjahan's selfish, cruel, haughty and proud bearing.

The Peacock Throne was here

The above description of silver doors and gold railings leads to a very interesting and unexpected conclusion. Let us also remember that the marble grill panels surrounding the cenotaphs were fitted with gems, according to tradition. Now

imagine an octagonal hall with the richest mosaic flooring in the world most artistically worked out, having silver doors and railings of solid gold. These surroundings go to prove that they must be enclosing something equally expensive, glittering and grand within their confines. It certainly could not be a mere dead body. It could only be the resplendent Peacock Throne studded with gems. Moreover Hindu thrones always used to have animal effigies underneath. Every deity in the Hindu pantheon has its own special animal conveyance. In ancient Indian tradition the word for a throne is "Lion-Seat". On the other hand associating any effigy with the sacred and orthodox kingly tradition and authority was highly sacrilegious by Islamic practice. Therefore the celebrated Peacock Throne now in the Shah's palace in Tehran is an ancient Indian, Hindu throne. In the years preceding the takeover of the Taj from its Rajput owner the Peacock Throne seems to have occupied the place where the tombs of Shahjahan and Mumtaz are now located. Therefore the current concept of Shahjahan having ordered the Peacock Throne, is baseless. The Throne came to him by capture from its Rajput owners.

This conclusion is strengthened by another clue namely that the mosaic flooring of the Diwan-i-Khas in the Red Fort Agra, and of the Diwan-i-Khas in the Delhi Red Fort, is identical in material and design with the rich design on the cenotaphs in the Taj Mahal. Now, since the Diwan-i-Khas in the forts at Delhi and Agra, were palaces it necessarily follows that the Taj was a palace of which the cenotaph chamb er was the throne room.

Reception Quadrangle outside Taj Grounds

Outside the main entrance to the Taj grounds is a huge quadrangle bordered by red sandstone buildings. This was the reception quadrangle in which guests driving in at palace receptions during Rajput rule, were received. As they alighted from their horse-carriages or palkhis their body-guard lined up at a respectful distance. Such a huge reception area enclosed by massive and expensive buildings remains unexplained if the Taj is considered an original tomb. But for a palace those buildings are always necessary for guards, attendants, liveried servants, caterers and a host of others to stay in.

Shahjahan got the Taj with all its Wealth

Having seen above how the Taj Mahal had the most expensive fixtures, since it housed the glittering bejewelled Peacock Throne, we can easily see why a haughty, overbearing, and proud Shahjahan coveted it. To him the palace belonging to a Rajput family was an eyesore. The hereditary splendour of that family to which incidentally, belongs the present ruler of Jaipur, outshone that of the Moghul court. Since that was an unbearable thought to Shahjahan he made the death of his wife an occasion to oust the Rajput family from its ancestral home. In getting the Taj Mahal vacated Shahjahan fulfilled several objectives : He finished at one stroke the splendour, might and status of a wealthy Rajput family ; he obtained a dreamland monument for his dead wife, and in the same bargain he also amassed a fortune by removing the gems fixed in the marble grills, the silver doors and the gold railings.

Taj Garden Contained Trees Sacred to Hindus

Mediaeval Muslim chroniclers speak of a rich garden

having existed in the Taj grounds. It need not be stressed that a graveyard is never planted over with choice fruit and flower trees since the idea that one is enjoying the perfume of flowers, and fruits fertilized by decaying dead bodies is loathsome. Had the Taj Mahal been an original tomb such a garden ought not to have formed part of it. But since such a garden did exist in the Taj grounds it is proof of the Taj Mahal having been an erstwhile palace.

A garden growing the choicest flowers and fruits is a necessary adjunct of a palace for the enjoyment of its occupants and guests. The trees and plants listed are those which are not only preferred by the Hindus but are sacred to them. The list mentions : Bel, Ketaki, Jui, Champa, Harsingar, Maulashree and Motiya.

It is well known that Bel is a sacred tree associated with the worship of Lord Shankar. Its leaves are always used in such worship while its fruit is prescribed by Ayurveda for stomach ailments. The other names are all Sanskrit and have a similar significance. This is strong evidence of the Rajput ownership and authorship of the Taj Mahal.

Ashes of Shahjahan and Mumtaz (?)

On page 46 of Maulvi Moinuddin's book is a very curious statement. It says referring to the graves "In the centre of those structures lie the receptacles which hold the ashes of Shahjahan and Mumtaz." The word "ashes" is very intriguing. It points to several possibilities if the author has used the word literally and not figuratively to signify only the remains. But being a Muslim the significance of the word "ashes" in relation to the bodies of Mumtaz and Shahjahan should not have been lost on him. Is it possible then that

Shahjahan and Mumtaz were cremated instead of being just buried. Or since history does not contain any reference to their cremation as distinguished from burial, the graves contain the ashes of somebody else. In that case have the "ashes" to do anything with the Rajput owners of the Taj palace, since as Hindus they were always cremated ? This is something worth investigating.

Taj Engravings Contain Only Part of Koran

Had the Taj Mahal been an original tomb the design should have provided for the engraving on it of the entire Koran. But, says Maulvi Moinuddin on page 48 ;"The common idea that the text of the whole Koran has been inscribed in the Taj is incorrect. Only 14 chapters are strewn here and there throughout the mass of structures. Since the Taj was a Hindu palace its arches provided space only for 14 chapters and no more.

The Hush Hush about the Basement

An enigmatic silence and hush hush has been maintained about the basement chambers of the Taj, including the sepulchral chamber, since Shahjahan's times. Testifying to it Bernier says (about the basement) "It is opened with much ceremony once in a year, and once only ; and as no Christian is admitted within...I have not seen the interior..."

Had Shahjahan and Mumtaz been buried in original tombs there was no reason for debarring anyone from the annual memorial rites. In fact on such occasions guests ought always to be welcome to add to the importance, grandeur and dignity of the ceremony. Therefore the restriction is intriguing, and raises the presumption that men who could not be relied upon to keep the secret were disallowed. In this

connection it may also be mentioned that there are several other basement chambers filled with sand, mentioned by Maulvi Moinuddin in his book, which do not seem to have been touched by researchers and archaeologists. It would be worthwhile undertaking a thorough investigation of the Taj Mahal basement and the large open verandahs to clear the mystery of the origin of the Taj. They are likely to contain a lot of debris of the demolished parts of the erstwhile Rajput palace. That such an important monument as the Taj which is a world attraction should be left unexplored in its deeper recesses speaks of the unconcern of our archaeologists towards needed research.

Ancient Hindus Alone Could Construct Taj Mahal

E.B. Havell in his article titled *"The Taj and its Designers"* (Vol. III, P. 1047, *The 19th Century and After*—a monthly review edited by James Knowles) observes "Some Indian records of the Taj mention the name of one Mannu Beg as the principal mosaic worker, but in the list of the principal workmen given by the Imperial Library Manuscript, five mosaic workers from Kanauj all with Hindu names are entered...The best Agra mosaic workers of the present day are also Hindus..."

The above passage is very revealing in many respects. It highlights the utter confusion that prevails about the designers and workmen connected with the Taj Mahal. Such confusion arises only because of repeated attempts over generations to fill in the blanks in a fictitious story with a view to make a cogent account. Such attempts have resulted in European scholars trying to fill the void by crediting the artistry in the Taj to Frenchmen and Italians, while chauvinistic Muslim

accounts have presisted in inserting fictitious Muslim names in the blanks. In this welter the names of Hindu architects and artisans mentioned in the Imperial Library Manuscript could well be those of the original workmen who, centuries before Shahjahan, built the Taj Mahal.

Havell's observation that "the best Agra mosaic workers of the present day are also Hindus" clearly proves a long tradition among the Hindus of an art of which the Taj Mahal is the finest specimen. It must be remembered that with the start of Muslim invasions education and *training in all arts* came to a dead halt. Al Biruni writing about Mohammad Ghazni's inroads into India observed that he ground the Hindus to dust and scattered them all over. (Dr. Edward C. Sachau's *Albiruni's India*, preface) The process begun by Alaptagin, Sabuktagin and Mohammad Ghazni, of pulvarizing Indian life and culture, continued in all its fury at least until Aurangzeb. Thereafter its tempo slackened because of the resurgence of nationalist forces. In that nightmarish period Indians were ferreted out of their homes and towns off and on. What scope was there then to cultivate any art or prosecute any studies? If then the best moasic workers in Agra are still Hindus, as testified by Havell, they could only be the descendants of those who built the Taj Mahal before the advent of the Muslims in India. This lends additional force to the conclusion that the Taj Mahal was an ancient Rajput palace and not a comparatively modern tomb of the Moghul times.

False Credits to Shahjahan

That the Taj Mahal is not the only monument falsely credited to Shahjahan, is apparent from another of Havell's

observations. On page 1045 of the volume containing his above-referred article he says "In my opinion the Delhi Pietra Dura (the figure drawing of birds inlaid in the rear wall of the royal balcony in the Diwan-i-Am, Red Fort, Delhi) has been wrongly attributed to Shahjahan's reign...The naturalistic representation of birds and animals was a violation of Muslim law. The strict letter of (Koranic) law forbade the representation of the likeness of anything which is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath."

Since the Pietra Dura is an integral part of the Red Fort, and not an after-thought or of subsequent graft, Havell, in effect, concedes that the Red Fort in Delhi, commonly ascribed to Shahjahan, existed in pre-Muslim times when such figure-drawings were not only not taboo but considered essential decoration in royal mansions.

The authorship of the Jama Masjid in Delhi and the city of Old Delhi itself have been wrongly credited to Shahjahan. There is not an iota of proof behind those assertions. Let anyone produce even a scrap of paper from Shahjahan's court records showing that he commissioned the Taj Mahal and the other buildings ascribed to him. Had there been any such proof there would have been no need for any history scholars to advance their own guesses.

Muslim Claims Found Untenable

The pitiable state of Indian history in which baseless claims made in mediaeval Muslim chronicles to ancient monuments, have been left unchallenged arises from the disinterestedness of India's erstwhile British rulers to subject them to a thorough check. Since they, as rulers, manned the educational apparatus in India no Indian dared refuse to toe

the official line lest he be denied an educational degree in history and consequently be disabled from earning a living. Those not studying history were in no position to know that the Indian history being taught to generations was all perverted and distorted. Thus historians or otherwise Indians lacked the capacity to challenge the history being taught to them.

Subconsciously the British administration in India was, however, aware of the falsification of Indian history on a very large scale. Therefore whenever claims affecting their interest in ancient buildings were advanced they, very officiously, ordered investigations knowing full well that the result would be favourable to them. One such instance is recorded in the *Transactions of the Archaeological Society of Agra*, January to June 1878, page 3. It is a note on the Mubarak Manzil or Old Custom House, by the Joint Secretary. He records "Having been called upon to inquire and report whether the building occupied by the Custom House in Balliganj was originally a Mohammaden mosque or not, I beg to state as follows : The building in question does not appear to have been originally a Mohammaden mosque...It would seem that the building was named Mubarak Manzil in consequence of its being the first halting place of emperor Aurangzeb after hearing the news of the victory which his troops gained in the Decean...There are signs extant of a small portion of the building set apart for prayer but this it will be found has always been done by the Mohammaden emperors..."

The words "it will be found (this) has always been done by Mohammaden emperors" are particulariy noteworthy. Thus the Mubarak Manzil, referred to above, is clearly an

These decorative patterns on the Taj walls are identical with those in the Rajput Amer palace near Jaipur. The latter was built nearabout 984 A. D.' much before consolidation of Muslim rule in India. While the entire flora in these patterns is Indian, lotuses particularly sacred to the Rajputs, may be noticed on the left. The chipped patterns in the right middle could have resulted when the Taj changed its role from palace to tomb.

ancient Rajput mansion occupied by the British as successors to the Mughals. Similar inquiries conducted in the origin of all extant mediaeval monuments will clearly prove that they originated as Rajput mansions, castles and temples. By conquest and usurpation they came to be regarded as original mosques, tombs and forts built by the Muslims. Single walls capped with minars, or grave-like mounds, appearing at desolate spots in fields or by roadsides throughout India are mostly remnants of or super-impositions on ancient Hindu monuments.

Another instance of the lack of incentive which prevented British scholars from reconstructing the history of India's mediaeval monuments, and made them acquiesce in Muslim claims, is provided in the *Transactions of the Archaeological Society of Agra*, July to December 1875. On page 14 of that volume, describing Salimgarh, it is said "In front of the artillery barracks and overlooking the great courtyard of the Diwan-i-Am, is a singular and apparently purposeless square building...It is ornamented in a sort of Hinduised style, like the Jehangiri Mahal...Tradition has nothing to say beyond giving this a name..."

Discerning scholars can get several very revealing clues in the above passage. Firstly it confesses that both what are known as Salimgarh and Jehangiri Mahal are ancient Hindu buildings because iconoclastic Muslim rulers would never tolerate Hindu ornamentation in the buildings they ordered, if any. What is more revealing is that many parts of those buildings appear superfluous and "purposeless" because those buildings were usurped. Conquerors would naturally be at a loss to explain away the significance of every single part of captured buildings according to their way of life since the

buildings were built by those professing a different way of life. In spite of such glaring inconsistencies, anomalies and lacunae in the past history of every single mediaeval monument it was sheer intellectual inertia arising from lack of incentive which prevented British scholars from inquiring into and writing the true history of India's mediaeval monuments. Indian scholars being subservient to the British dared not deviate from the latter's findings for fear of being denied official recognition and patronage.

Is the Tarikh-i-Taj Mahal a Forgery ?

A document called the Tarikh-i-Taj Mahal supposed to record the origin and history of the Taj Mahal, had been in the hereditary possession of the caretakers of that monument. According to newspaper reports that document has now been stolen and taken to a foreign country. On page 152 *Keene's Handbook* states "The authenticity of this document is somewhat questionable." Obviously he has used the word "somewhat" out of a sense of modesty and caution. What he actually meant to convey was that the documet was a forgery. Even ordinary judgment tells us that the need for a forged document arises only when a false claim is to be staked. Had the Taj Mahal been an original tomb the need for a forged document would never have arisen. The existence of such a document is substantial proof that when the Taj Mahal was taken from its rightful owners for being converted into a tomb or even earlier, its original papers were destroyed and replaced by fake documents. That is why no aspect of the Taj as described in the traditional version, is free from doubt and suspicion.

Mediaeval Courts were Hot-Beds of Squalor, Intrigue and Vice.

Contrary to the traditional belief in their nostalgic grandeur the courts of mediaeval rulers were hot-beds of squalor, intrigue, vice, cruelty and torture. There was no scope for the promotion of art or other higher values of life in that atmosphere. All talk, therefore, about dance, painting, music and building art having been encouraged is baseless. In fact with the beginning of Muslim invasions all progress ceased because most of the citizenry were worried about their own physical security and the safety of their wives and children. In such an atmosphere of intense terror nothing thrives. A building like the Taj Mahal pre-supposes a long period of peace and prosperity.

In his treatise "*Imperial Agra of the Moghuls* Mr. Keshab Chandra Majumdar says on page 5 "Etmad-ud-Daula, father of Nur Jahan tells us that as many as 5,000 women nestled in Moghul harems......the male issues of some of the women had to undergo solitary confinement for life." When such was the end of the ruler's own progeny one can very well imagine the lot of the citizenry, a majority of whom belonged to a religion and culture highly detested by the ruler. Besides we know how sodomy was rampant among the ruling families and the noblemen ; how eunuchs formed an important adjunct of the Muslim courts. Does not such an atmosphere lead to desolation and a negation of all art ?

What with the incessant warfare they had to conduct, retinues of servants they kept, a nobility thirsting for wealth and the huge harems, the Muslim rulers in India were always hardpressed for money. To put it in the lay man's terms they could hardly make both ends meet. All descriptions,

therefore, of the immense wealth of the court are incorrect. Wealth no doubt there used to be, constantly replenished by plundering the citizenry, but it used to get drained away no sooner than it was brought in. Thus court wealth ebbed and swelled. In fact pressing wants necessitated raids on the ruler's poor and defenceless subjects as a manoeuvre of statecraft. Almost as soon as the wealth came in it had to be disbursed. The fancied treasure-reserves for fanciful projects like a Taj Mahal to bury a deceased queen in were just not there. Contrary accounts written by mediaeval Muslim chroniclers were motivated by the need to flatter the ruler and ensure a steady share of the ruler's wealth, for themselves. Basking in the sunshine of royal favour the so-called chroniclers wangled for themselves a cushy job of praising the ruler to sky heights, and sharing in his spoils.

Instance of Wild Guesses

A typical instance of how the history of Indian monuments and their architecture, has been based on wild conjectures is found on page 33 of *Keene's Handbook*. A footnote there says "Alimardan Khan (the governor of Kandahar) probably introduced the bulbous dome, which some regard as a marked feature in the decadence of Saracenic architecture in India; a striking example being found in the dome of the Taj Mahal." This shows how traditional theories are just conjectural bubbles inflated with endless "probables". On page 209 Keene says "The Chausath Khamba is believed to be a tomb of Bakshi Salabat Khan" (Shahjahan's chief treasurer). The word Chausath Khamba is a non-Muslim term. Ought not students of history to ask themselves as to who footed the bills of these expensive mausoleums for all Toms, Dicks

and Harries including eunuchs, fauzdars, prostitutes, fakirs, sons, grandsons and great grandsons ? Is such a thing possible within the ambit of human nature as it is constituted ? Is it possible that those who built no palaces for themselves or their children built palatial tombs for hated predecessors.

Taj Mahal has Pleasure Pavilions

Keene tells the reader on page 150 of his *Handkook* that "...two baradaries and other accessories of a pleasure resort were provided here after the burial of Mumtaz..."

It is absurd to imagine that a monarch bereaving the death of his wife would provide pavilions at state expense for people to visit and revel in especially during Shahjahan's despotic era when the subjects counted for nothing.

But the presence of the pleasure pavilions is yet another convincing proof that the baradaries are there because the Taj originated as a Rajput palace.

Uncertainty about Mumtaz's Burial

How the whole story of the building of the Taj Mahal is all bluff and bluster, is apparent from yet another weak link in the traditional account. On page 165 of his *Handbook* Keene states "It is highly probable that the remains of Mumtaz (brought from Burhanpur where they had lain for six months) lay in the temporary tomb near the Masjid Baoli for about nine years...When they were finally removed to this tomb (in the basement of the so-called Taj Mahal) is not authoritatively known." Since such an important detail as the removal of Mumtaz's body to its final resting place is missing, after all the pother of Shahjahan having built a dreamland monument specially for her burial, the question arises whether the Taj does in fact contain the remains of

Mumtaz and Shahjahan or whether the cenotaphs are just meant to claim an ancient Rajput palace ?

Marble Screens

Another instance of the pathetic loopholes that riddle every single detail of the Taj concerns the marble screens around the cenotaphs. About these *Keene's Handbook* says on page 171 "The marble screen enclosing an octagonal area in the centre of the cenotaph chamber was, according to *Badshahnama*, placed here in 1642 by Shahjahan...According, however, to competent authority the screen was placed here by Aurangzeb after he laid his father's remains there."

This passage invites close examination. It should be noted that Keene does not consider the *Badshahnama*, the chronicle written at Shahjahan's own bidding, to be worthy of any credence since he calls the other authorities more competent. In so far as Keene disbelieves *Badshahnama* he is right because as has been repeatedly emphasized by me and several other discerning students of history, mediaevel Muslim chronicles were written for flattery, motivated by the desire to bask in the monarch's favour. But Keene is wrong in holding that even the "other authorities" he refers to as "competent" were any the more trustworthy. Sycophants whether of Shahjahan's or Aurangzeb's court were birds of the same feather. The only plausible conclusion we can draw then is that the marble screen was all along there enclosing the precious Peacock Throne of the Rajput owners of the Taj palace. Aurangzeb was hardly the man who would spend any money on decorating his father's tomb.

Inscription on Mumtaz's Tomb Revealing

Sleeman in his *Rambles and Recollections of an Indian*

Official says on page 21 that a Koranic text quoted on the queen's tomb terminates with the words "And defend us from the tribe of unbelievers..." This ending is significant since our whole point has been to prove that the Taj Mahal was commandeered from an "unbelieving" family precisely to end that "tribe". The choice of the passage for quoting on Mumtaz's tomb, betrays the purpose.

Pressure Propaganda

How a steady barrage of pressure propaganda kept up through centuries has resulted in misleading and befooling generations of laymen, scholars, students of history and architects into the belief that the massive and magnificent mediaeval monuments are of Muslim authorship, though in fact they belong to an earlier period, may be illustrated from Sleeman's experience. In chapter IV on page 29 of his book, in describing his visits to momuments in Agra, the author says "I crossed over the river Jumna one morning to look at the tomb of Etmad-ud-Daulah...On my way back I asked one of the boatmen, who was rowing me, who had built what appeared to me a new dome within the fort ?

"One of the emperors of course," said he.

"What makes you think so ?"

"Because such things are made only by emperors," replied the man quietly.

"True, very true," said an old Musalman trooper who had dismounted to follow me, with a melancholy shake of the head. "Very true ; who but emperors could do such things as these ?"

Encouraged by the trooper the boatman continued "The Jats and Marathas did nothing but pull down and destroy while they held their accursed dominion here..."

In the above passage we have a clue how Western scholars and visitors have been misguided by the prattle of interested people.

How palpably absurd the accusation against the Marathas and Jats is can be seen from the unscathed existence of the Taj and the so-called Etmad-ud-Daulah tomb. Not that they are original Muslim buildings but ever since they were put to use as Muslim tombs the Jats and Marathas did not so much as even scratch them. But somehow the pressure propaganda has succeeded in its objective of making people wrongly believe in Muslim authorship of mediaeval monuments.

I myself had a similar experience as Sleeman.

Once while on a visit to Agra Fort I asked a bearded Muslim, hurrying for his ablution with a potful of water, as to in which part of the fort had Shivaji been incarcerated by Aurangzeb. In asking that question I wanted to test the popular version because within my own mind I was clear that Shivaji had been confined to Ram Singh's home outside the fort. But the Muslim, even without batting an eyelid or fumbling for an answer, pointed to a distant spot beyond a partition wall, well within the area occupied by the army, and therefore unapproachable by visitors. I then realized from own experience how the lay public and serious students of history alike have been consistently misled by unscrupulous people through blatant statements not only spoken but officiously recorded in mediaeval volumes believed to be authentic records of contemporary events.

Devastating Demolition of the Taj Legend

All that has been said in the foregoing pages should be enough to convince even the most credulous that the Taj

legend is a big hoax played on a gullible world. Every aspect of it is riddled with contradictions. The falsity of the traditional version about the building of the Taj Mahal by Shahjahan stands thoroughly exposed. We must, therefore, try to reconstruct a true account of how the Taj Mahal originated.

Reconstructing the True Story of the Taj

A number of clues discussed above have shown us that the Taj Mahal orginated as a gay palace and not as a sombre tomb ; its grandeur, pleasure pavilions, the marble screen, the rich mosaic flooring, rich fixtures like silver doors and gold railings, hundreds of rooms, names like Khawaspura and Jaisinghpura, lush garden full of the choicest fruit and flower plants holy to the Rajputs, and the like.

Keene's Handbook referring to the falsity of mediaeval Muslim chroniclers observes on page 171 "Indian historians, in attempting to belaud the acts of their kingly patrons, have often committed themselves to statements which under the searchlight of subsequent scrutiny are found to be absolutely inaccurate,"

In the subsequent pages he confirms that "the cenotaph of Shahjahan...is unsymmetrically placed (p. 172). There are 14 rooms in a line along the river face of the great basement (p. 177)"...According to the *Badshahnama* there were four serais each with 136 rooms in Mumtazabad (which obviously was the name foisted on the former Jaisinghpura and Khawaspura), and a central chowk (square) from which roads branched off at right angles. This is further testimony that the ancient Rajput palace which is now known as Taj Mahal was surrounded by other huge buildings connected with a network

of roads. That is exactly what the term "pura" signifies in Sanskrit. Such a huge building complex can only be justified if a palace is its nucleus. A tomb does neither need such annexes nor can anyone afford them.

Other Evidence

After having culled and quoted above the evidence, from books and articles dealing with the Taj, discrediting the traditional Taj legend, and establishing that it originated as a palace and not tomb, we shall now concern ourselves with a survey of the building itself.

Significance of the Term "Taj Mahal"

The significance of the term "Taj Mahal" is itself worth considering at the outset. "Taj" means crown and "Mahal" is residence. The term therefore means the best among residences or the residence of those wearing a crown. In either case it means that the Taj Mahal has been a royal residence. There is a world af difference between a mausoleum and a grand residence (palace) meant for the living. A tomb could by no stretch of imagination be designated as a "palace" unless a palace itself has been converted into a tomb. Only when a palace has been subsequently used as a tomb, will the term "palace" continue to stick to the monument. That is exactly what has happened with regard to the Taj Mahal.

The lame explanation that because the title of the lady believed to be buried there was Mumtaz Mahal, therefore the building is called "Taj Mahal", is unconvincing because a woman's name is never split into two unequal parts to designate her tomb with one.

Babur Died in the Taj Palace

Vincent Smith observes on page 9 of his book *Akbar the*

Great Moghul that Babur's stormy life "came peaceably to an end in his garden-palace at Agra." There having been no other garden palace heard of, this obviously is a reference to the so-called Taj Mahal which we have proved to be a Rajput palace surrounded by a lush garden. Babur having defeated the Rajput rulers controlling the Agra—Fatehpur Sikri area all their forts, palaces and mansions came apparently under his occupation. In the changing fortunes of those hectic times, especially after Humayun's debacle at Sher Shah's hands, the prized palace was sometimes regained by or restored to its erstwhile Rajput owners while at other times it was occupied by Muslim conquerors. During such a chequered career the Taj happened to be in Jaisingh's possession during Shahjahan's reign until the latter took it into his head to acquire it once for all. And what better excuse could be found for a quick dispossession than the pressing need to provide a fitting tomb for Shahjahan's deceased consort ?

Taj Mahal was Occupied by Hindu, Muslim Royalty for Generations

Since Vincent Smith mentions on page 9 of his book titled *Akbar the Great Mughal* that Babar died in his garden palace at Agra it is clear that all of Babar's predecessors and successors who ruled over Agra must have spent at least a few days or hours in the Taj palace as absolute owners or as guests of Rajput noblemen like Raja Mansingh and Jaisingh on whom ownership of the Taj ultimately devolved. According to the Persian Poet Salman Agra fort was captured by Mohammad Gazhni, after a desperate assault, from Jaipal. Whosoever ruled the fort, owned the Taj palace. Thus we come to the conclusion that Jaipal had owned the Taj, and lived in it. After him Mohammad Gazhni should have stayed

in the Taj at least occasionally though for security reasons he must have preferred the massive confines of the fort. The others who seem to have been in occupation of the nearly 20-room marble suite of the Taj Palace are : Rajput rulers of the Tuar clan who came to power after Mohommad Gazhni's invasion, Vishaldev Chauhan, Bahlol Lodi, Sikandar Lodi, Babur, Humayun, Sher Shah, Jalal Khan, Humayun again, Akbar, Mansingh, Jagatsingh and Jaisingh. It was from the last owner, as all versions invariably admit, that the Taj property was taken by Shahjahan to be converted into a tomb.

As the Taj had been a royal residence for generations, occupied by those who controlled Agra, it is clear that it must have been the scene of many royal births and deaths as is evidenced by the reference to Babur's death in it.

Tiny Refl ector Glass Piece is Rajput Device

In the Agra Fort gallery facing the Taj, is a tiny glass piece embedded in the wall to mirror the Taj Mahal. Originators of the Taj legend have conveniently annexed the device to add to the mesmeric effect of the myth. Embedding tiny, round glass reflectors by their thousands in arched recesses of palaces and in women's dresses is a very common and widespread Rajput practice. Such glass reflectors can still be seen fixed in nnmerous ancient palaces in Rajasthan, and continue to be used for decoration in women's dresses Saracenic architecture, if there be any such, should rather believe in "purdah" *i.e.* shrouding or hiding and would never think of glass reflectors. The glass reflector in the Agra Fort gallery enabled the Rajput ruler—owner to have a telescopic view of

the Taj palace from the fort. Shahjahan was never permitted access during internment, to that part of the fort which overlooks the Taj. It is, therefore, absurd to argue that during detention he consoled himself by catching glimpses of the Taj in the tiny glass piece. A further absurdity and inconsistency is : would an old monarch, bent with age, stand up all the time to strain his bedimmed vision, and peer into a tiny glass piece to catch a fleeting, reflected glimpse of the Taj when he could have a clear, full, straight and direct view of it by facing the Taj. And would not such a stance give him a pain in the neck ? This is yet another instance of how students of history, archaeologists and lay visitors have never bothered or cared to take stock of the loose bits of the Taj legend, and tried to rearrange them to find out whether they add up to at least a coherent and cogent account even though fictitious.

Mahatma Gandhi's Samadhi and Mumtaz's Tomb

Since readers can have a better idea of the results achieved by the time, labour and money spent on mediaeval memorial monuments by comparing them with similar recent projects let us compare Mahatma Gandhi's samadhi with the Taj Mahal if the latter is to be believed to be an original tomb.

Mahatma Gandhi's samadhi too has been nearly 17 years under construction. It has a garden around it. And crores of rupees have been spent in constructing it. Roughly, therefore, the time, labour and money spent on Mahatma Gandhi's samadhi tallies with the most exaggerated version of the time, labour and money spent on the Taj. And yet the results are vastly different. Mahatma Gandhi's samadhi stands no comparison with the grandeur, massiveness, covered area, embellishments and the beauty of the Taj Mahal.

This is so in spite of Mahatma Gandhi having commanded almost universal respect and love from a vastly larger population and a wider region. In addition to its sculptural splendour the Taj is also believed to have had gem-studded marble screens, gold railings and silver doors. Readers can well add up the cost of all these. It will add up to a fabulous astronomical sum. Perhaps even all the Mughal emperors together could not have invested that much on a single monument. Besides, who would lavish so much wealth on a monument which would be the haunt of fakirs and menial servants. Moreover such lavishness ill suits a sepulchre. It is only temporal palaces which can and do have such magnificence.

Taj Mahal Entrance Faces South

Both the entrance from the redstone quadrangle into the Taj grounds as well as the entrance to the cenotaph chamber face south. Had the Taj been an original sepulchre its entrances should have faced the west because Islam allows communion with Allah, for both the living and the dead, only through the west. This is a very important clue to refute the traditional claim that the Taj Mahal originated as a tomb.

Comparison With Other Tombs

Mediaeval Indian monuments are almost always tombs except in a few cases. At the outset it appears strange that a long line of these extrovert monarchs built tombs after tombs but seldom any palaces. It is stranger still that the successor who built a palatial tomb for the predecessor, according to current tradition, also thirsted for the predecessor's blood while the latter ruled. For argument's sake if we assume both those propositions to be true then that practice of building tombs ought to have some uniformity and sense of pro-

portion. From this point of view let us compare the so-called tombs of Humayun, Akbar and Mumtaz. Humayun had hardly re-established himself in India when within six months he died. He could hardly boast of any large empire, and yet his so-called tomb in Delhi, is a huge palatial building. Akbar, the mightiest of the Moghuls, has a comparatively modest and simple tomb in Sikandra. Mumtaz, the second wife of Shahjahan, and one among thousands of his consorts, has the grandest mausoleum. In grandeur and magnificence Taj Mahal, Humayun's tomb and Akbar's mausoleum would rank first, second and third respectively. The reader may now reflect whether that is the ranking in history of the persons whose tombs those buildings are supposed to be. That all those buildings are palaces and are entirely in the Hindu style, has also to be remembered. From this it becomes clear that it was a question of using whichever Rajput palace or temple that came handy for the burial, and not one of building any new mausoleum. That is why the tombs do not present any uniformity or sense of proportion with respect to the importance of the individuals they commemorate. The turmoil and the deadly internecine struggle that followed the death of every Muslim ruler also ruled out the possibility of any special and palatial mausoleum being built. Nobody had any exclusive control of the treasury, and even if he had why would he bother to spend it on an infructuous, sentimental project of commemorating a dead predecessor, than on winning the war of succession. And who would supervise the building construction, and how would he do it ?

Unanimity About Jaisingh's Ownership

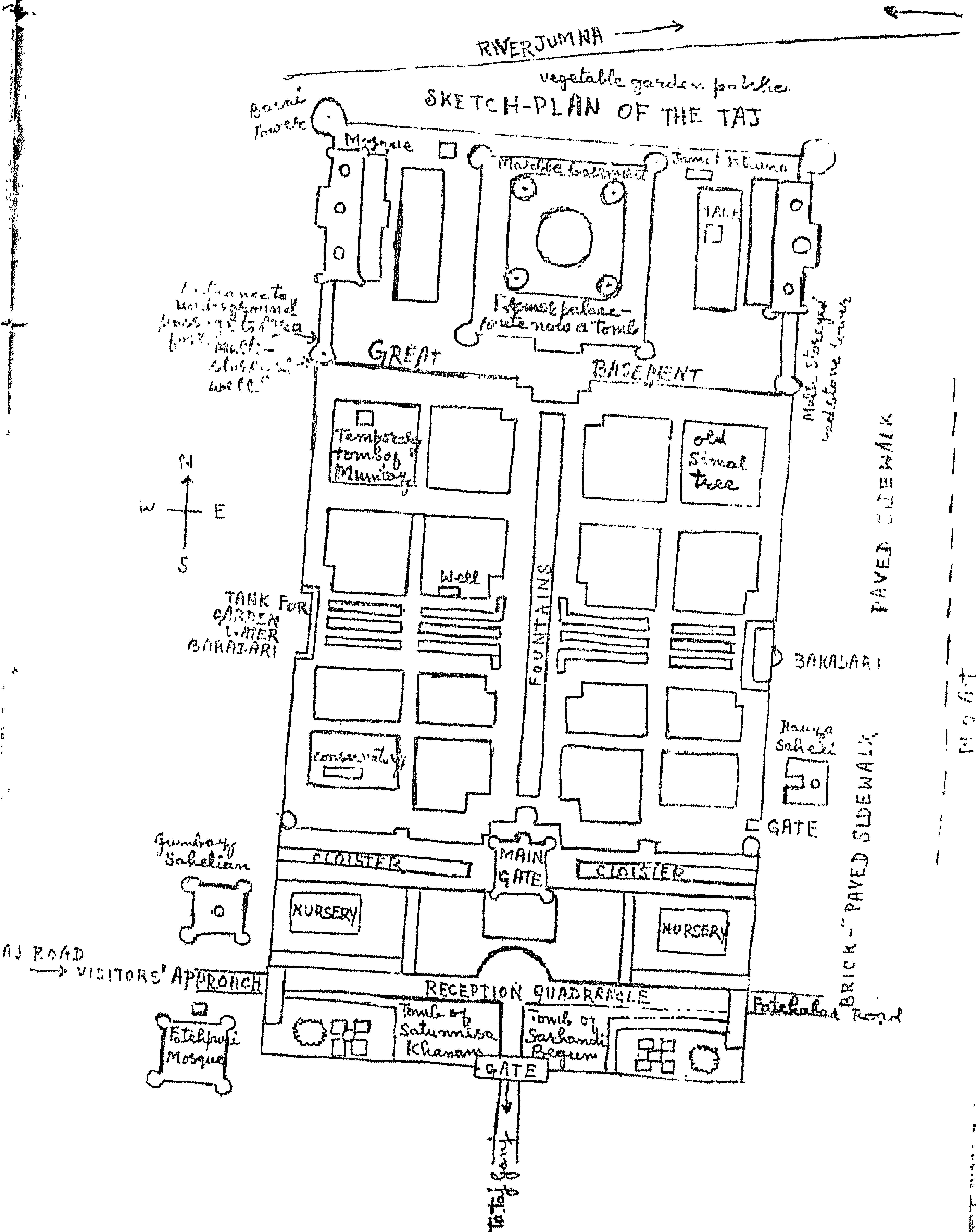
In the entire fabric of the Taj Mahal legend woven with the warp and woof of contradictions, canards and inconsis-

tencies there is only one factor remarkably constant in every narrative and version, whether modern or mediaeval, and whether emanating from a Muslim chronicler or non-Muslim. That detail is about the undisputed and unquestioned ownership of the "Taj" estate ; that it belonged to Jaisingh the grandson of Man Singh. From them is descended the present ruling house of Jaipur.

We have already observed earlier that the so-called Humayun's tomb in Delhi was a palace forming part of the Jaipur Estate. The Taj Mahal was also their palace in Agra. Architecturally also both are similar, except that the grandeur, magnificence and delicacy of the Taj surpasses that of the Delhi monument.

The undisputed ownership of Jaisingh over the "Taj" estate before it was taken over by Shahjahan, is a very crucial detail. In fact in the mass of evidence available before us Jaisingh's title to the Taj property is the kingpin or the pivot on which the whole case turns from its traditional Shahjahan orientation to earlier Rajput origin.

Any court of law where men of worldy wisdom preside and who do not allow their judgment to run away with nostalgic myths, would at once see the importance of the one unanimously conceded detail of Jaisingh's ownership of the Taj property, as of considerable importance. History scholars have blundered precisely at this point. Believing that Shahjahan built an original tomb they all along presumed that he acquired only an empty plot of land from Jaisingh. But we have already found from a very close scrutiny that the Taj legend is a fabrication from beginning to end, the inescapable conclusion, therefore, is that Shahjahan acquired a ready-made palace and converted it into a tomb.


RIVER JUMNA
SKETCH-PLAN OF THE TAJ
Mosque
TANK
GREAT
BASEMENT
Temporary tomb of Mumtaz
old Simal tree
N
W
E
S
Well
FOUNTAINS
TANK FOR GARDEN WATER BARADARI
BARADARI
PAVED SIDEWALK
GATE
MAIN GATE
CLOISTER
CLOISTER
NURSERY
NURSERY
VISITORS' APPROACH
RECEPTION QUADRANGLE
Tomb of Satunnisa Khanam
Tomb of Sarhandi Begum
Fatehpuri Mosque
GATE
BRICK-PAVED SIDEWALK
Fatehabad Road
To Taj Ganj

Many Other Supporting Clues

Though we have observed above that Jaisingh's ownership clinches the issue yet there are several other proofs which reinforce our contention that the Taj Mahal originated as a Rajput palace.

Inside the Taj Mahal the entire tapestry is made up of Indian floral designs.

Had the Taj been an original tomb Shahjahan would never have allowed Indian flora to form the dominant feature of the tapestry design inside the mausoleum of his wife. It is idle to argue that because the workmen employed on the Taj happened to be Hindus their motifs got incorporated in the Taj design. It must be remembered that it is the person who pays the piper that calls the tune. Moreover when it is a question of the peace of the departed soul, symbols and motifs of a detested religion would never have been allowed to be incorporated in the ornamental patterns of the Taj. In fact the whole idea of having such a luxurious tomb built and having decorative patterns made inside it is frowned upon in Islamic religion and tradition. But Shahjahan had no other alternative but to put up with them since he had taken over a ready-made "heathen" monument. Those who argue that mediaeval Muslim rulers freely allowed adoption of the Hindu style and art in their monuments must consider that even in this 20th Century when the edge of orthodoxy has considerably blunted no group of Muslims will ever dare or care plan building a tomb or a mosque in the temple style.

Explaining away the presence of Hindu designs and motifs in the decorative patterns in the Taj, on the basis of Hindu workmen employed is futile on another ground also. Tradi-

tional Muslim records (which we have proved to be fictitious) have all along listed Muslim names as the sole designers and artisans of the Taj. Their having any love or penchant for Hindu motifs is out of question. One must also remember that the destruction of Indian temples, works of art, writings, scriptures, culture and religion used to be one of the primeval and dominant objectives of every Muslim ruler in India. How then could the same rulers ever tolerate, much less promote, the incorporation of Indian art patterns and motifs in their monuments ! All these considerations ought to convince us that historians and architects alike have from a superficial presumption believed mediaeval mosques and tombs to be original Muslim structures without feeling the necessity to go into the origin of those buildings. What is worse is that in innumerable instances when these historians and architects became aware, to their utter discomfiture, that contrary to written claims the buildings existed even before the death of the person whose tomb it was supposed to be, they explained them away by the canard that the deceased had "dug" his own grave in anticipation. Thus Hoshang Shah's tomb in Mandu (Central India), Akbar's tomb at Sikandra, and of Iltmush in Delhi are said to be essays in auto-tomb-building by those respective monarchs who cared a hang for anybody or anything while alive and who went through their lives as though they alone would never die. It is the height of absurdity to believe that the deceased monarchs built their own tombs. Nothing can be more ridiculous and puerile. The straight, true and cogent explanation is that Rajput-built mansions of old were used for the burial of Muslim monarchs. Since it did not sound very decent and dignified that august monarchs who had lorded it over during their lifetime were

not provided a fitting burial by their successors the latter have left false accounts of having built the tombs, as Jahangir claims to have built Akbar's tomb. Historians and architects having realized that statements like those of Jahangir and others claiming to be the builders of their respective predecessor's tombs were false substituted their own myth to explain away the discrepancy. It is time that such distortions and perversions deliberate and facile were removed from Indian historical texts.

Lotuses

Lotuses are interspersed in the decorative patterns in the Taj Mahal. Lotuses are not only very sacred to the Hindus but also an integral part of Hindu decorative art. Their presence reinforces the case of the Rajput origin of the Taj.

Underground Passage

The Taj is connected with the Agra fort with a subterranean passage. If the Taj is considered an original tomb an underground passage is not only redundant but absurd. Would a body laid to rest need an emergency exit and a subterranean one at that! The subterranean passage could not have been dug just for fun because such a passage entails huge expenditure and requires a high degree of engineering skill. England and France have been toying for the last 187 years with the idea of constructing a tunnel under the channel to connect the two countries. But even with their tremendous resources they still dare not undertake the project. Moreover guarding and maintaining such a passage is still more difficult. Maintenance would involve internal lighting ; preventing earth from falling from the sides and top ; providing against damp, reptiles and rodents, and a constant checkup againt potential enemies and miscreants using it as an hideout.

For the above reasons a subterranean passage could never be even a superfluous adjunct of a tomb. But the presence of an underground passage becomes plausible as soon as it is realized that the Taj Mahal originated as a palace and not as a tomb. A ruler staying in or visiting his palace needs an emergency underground exit if he is in danger of being surrounded by an hostile force. This is another very crucial factor in arriving at the conclusion that far from being a sepulchre the Taj was a palace.

River Ghat and Underground Chambers

The existence of a ghat and landing place for boats, near the Taj, also points to the inevitable conclusion that the Taj was a palace. The 14 underground chambers while being redundant in a tomb are a necessity in a palace. The same can be said about the Basai tower and the many annexes which have been referred to heretofore.

What Alterations did Shahjahan Make ?

It is hoped that the reader has been convinced by now from the evidence presented in the foregoing paras that the Taj Mahal originated as a palace. The question then naturally arises as to what changes, if any, did Shahjahan make, in the original structure. As explained earlier the "building work" referred to by contemporary European writers does signify the raising of intricate scaffolding, debris of demolished buildings, heaps of rocks to tidy-up the ravage done, and an army of labourers and workmen. The period of construction of the Taj, figures of the amount spent and of the workmen employed have been already shown to be immensely magnified to flatter the emperor or just to create an "impression" on the visitor, hearer or reader. Evidence of Shahjahan's haughty,

stingy, supercilious, cruel and self-centred nature has already been produced to show that he would never spend very much in commemorating one among thousands of his consorts. It has also been pointed out from historian writings that he actually got even the alterations made by just issuing meagre rations to the workmen. This having caused dissatisfaction and revolt he seems to have ordered the amputation of the hands of workmen. The changes that Shahjahan wrought in the ancient Rajput palace when he took it over to turn it into a tomb amount basically to two. Firstly he had a trench dug for the tomb in the basement and two cenotaphs made in the central ground floor chamber. Secondly he ordered inscribing Koranic texts in an inverted 'U' shape along some of the arches. But for these two minor changes the present Taj Mahal bordered by the four marble towers at the corners of the raised platform, is basically intact. The central chamber housing the cenotaphs was the central room of the palace where the ancient Hindu throne known as the Peacock Throne used to be kept. Therefore, but for superficial changes the Taj Mahal as we see it today is cent per cent the ancient Rajput palace.

How did Shahjahan Acquire It

While all accounts agree that before Shahjahan took it over the Taj property was owned by Jaisingh, they differ hopelessly, like every other detail, concerning the mode of acquisition. We have already seen that Shahjahan's own official chronicler Mulla Abdul Hamid has recorded that the Taj grounds (?) were exchanged for a good plot of land elsewhere in Shahjahan's dominions. But Prof. B. P. Saksena records in his book that the plot was "acquired for a nominal price." Significantly enough Abdul Hamid fails to point out

which plot was given in exchange as Mr. Saksena fails to say what the nominal price was. In Abdul Hamid's version the other doubt which arises is why all this bother about exchanging "one good" plot for another when Shahjahan could as well have built the tomb on the plot said to have been given in exchange. From this we conclude that Jaisingh was unceremoniously dispossessed of his ancestral palace containing untold wealth and rich fixtures, without being given any compensation. The motive was to demoralize the Rajputs, strip a wealthy family of its power and riches which were the envy of the Moghul emperor, acquire considerable wealth for the Moghul treasury, and to have the satisfaction of scoring yet another point against the much hated Indian people. The opportunity provided by the death of Mumtaz was fully made use of in hustling Jaisingh out of his ancestral luxury home. Scholars have erred in presuming that the property taken over must have been an open plot of land since it currently appears to be a tomb.

Shahjahan used to Falsify Records

Shahjahan had no scruples in ordering forged and false accounts to be written. This fact is known to historians. While a prince, Shahjahan had turned a rebel against his reigning father Jahangir. He had therefore been referred to in vile and abusive terms in the account of Jahangir's reign written at the latter's behest. Copies of that chronicle, officially blessed and circulated were with all the courtiers when Shahjahan came to the throne. For such a damaging record to be in the possession of the nobility even after Shahjahan had begun to rule was intolerable to him. He, therefore, ordered a fake *Jahangirnama* to be written and got it issued in place of

Jahangir's own version which was ordered to be surrendered. Such being his record it is no wonder if he got Abdul Hamid to write a cock and bull account of his having built the Taj Mahal, the Red Fort and Jama Masjid at Delhi and the old city of Delhi itself. If other monuments had not been claimed to have been built equally falsely, by other Muslim rulers Shahjahan could perhaps have been depended upon to extend his claim of authorship to those monuments too. As Sir H. M. Elliot notes in his "*Posthumous Papers*" dealing with *Jahangirnama*, Kamgar Khan the author of *Ma-asir-i-Jahangiri* records that he was induced to take to its writing by Shahjahan (to undo the harm that Jahangir had done to his reputation) in the 3rd year of his reign. This also shows that during medieval times in India there were ever so many people ready and [redacted] willing to write fabricated accounts at the monarch's behest.

Similarity of Rajput Monuments with the West Asian

It is often argued that since there are some monuments in West Asia similar to the mediaeval monuments in India like the so called Kutub Minar and the Taj Mahal it could only have been the Muslim rulers of India who got the latter constructed. It is conveniently forgotten by proponents of this view that Mohammad Gazhni, Taimur Lang and other invaders have gone on record to confess that on gatecrashing into India they gaped in wide-eyed wonder at even Indian river ghats not to talk of its grand temples and palaces. Compared to the mastery and skill achieved in India West Asian building art was very primitive. Imposing monuments were erected when Indian Kshatriyas ruled West Asia. But with the weakening of their hold an era of

revolt set in. Widespread chaos and destruction ushered a millenium of unrest in which the pursuit of art was tabooed and all education came to an end. Large groups headed by adventurous leaders not finding the wherewithals to live or pursue any peaceful occupation in their own homelands cast covetous eyes on lands like India abounding in wealth.

Taimur Lang has recorded in his autobiography that while massacring the Hindus he used to spare stone masons and other building workmen and artists to be driven across the Punjab and other northern regions to West Asia to build tombs and mosques as grand as the monuments he found in India.

Since Taimur Lang and all other invaders followed a set pattern Taimur Lang's observation is reminiscent of the practice of all mediaeval Muslim invaders of forcing hundreds and thousands of Indian craftsmen to go to West Asia, get converted to Islam, and settle down to build monuments in West Asian lands with Indian tools, and wealth plundered from India.

Indo-Saracenic Architecture Theory Needs to be Turned Inside Out

Scholars and students of Indian history and architecture must realize that the theory of Indo-Saracenic architecture needs to be turned inside out. Instead of monuments in India being built to Saracenic order and design, monuments in Saracenic lands were built by Indian craftsmen, with Indian tools and wealth and to Indian design. That explains the similarity, if any, of Indian mediaeval monuments with those found in West Asian countries.

When was the "Taj" Palace Built

Having proved by the evidence cited above that the so-called Taj Mahal is not an original tomb but a pre-Muslim palace it would be pertinent to find out who built it and when. In this regard perhaps the archives of the Jaipur royal family and of the Sikarwar Rajputs, founders of what is known as Fatehpur Sikri, could be useful in throwing some light. Those having access to such records would, therefore, do well to browse through those archives. Such an effort is bound to be immensely rewarding even otherwise for refuting many myths of mediaeval history which is currently a confused and tangled mass of motivated falsehoods.

From the material available to me I believe that the Taj must have been built in (Circa) 372 A.D. I have already said that the beauty, grandeur, magnificence and spacious dimensions of the Taj palace were only possible before Indian life was thrown into turmoil by Muslim invasions.

The question which arises next is when exactly during the pre-Muslim era was the "Taj" palace built. In this connection page 305 of Vol. II of Abul Fazl's *Akbarnama* (translated into English by Col. H. S. Jarrett, and annotated by Sir Jadunath Sarkar) gives a clue. Abul Fazl says "In the year 429 of the era of Bikramajit (A.D. 372) Anangpal of the Tonwar tribe reigned with justice and founded Delhi." A foot-note on the same page says "Anangpal was another name for Rayasena. Tieffen Thaler credits him with the building of Delhi, which is confirmed by *Agnipurana*."

At this point readers might recall my observations with regard to the antiquity of Badalgarh or the red fort at Agra. Even according to Muslim records that fort existed before

the early Muslim invasions. The subsequent claims of sycophant chroniclers that Sikandar Lodi or Akbar built that fort have been shown to be deceitful and misleading.

Since the Red Forts at Agra and Delhi are architectural twins they could only have been built simultaneously to a common design. Both had gates flanked by elephants. Part marble and part red sandstone has been used in both. Both have identical pavilions like the Diwan-i-Am and Diwan-i-Khas. Their facade is also identical.

Another important point to be considered is the battlemented walls of the two Red Forts could not have been designed after the use of gun powder and cannon balls came into vogue during warfare. The walls of the Red Forts would give way to shelling. Guns were first introduced into warefare in India by Muslims, at least as known so far. This also points to the pre-Muslim origin of the two Red Forts.

If then the Red Fort in Delhi was built in pre-Muslim times it must be ascribed to Anangpal alias Rayasena, as recorded by Abul Fazl. Since the Red Fort in Agra is of great antiquity extending into pre-Muslim times, and that fort is an architectural twin of the Red Fort in Delhi, it follows that the same Anangpal built the Red Fort in Agra too.

In their grandeur, loftiness, artistry and the use of part red-sandstone and part marble the two Red Forts and the Taj Mahal bear a great affinity to one another. Additionally the mosaic flooring of the Diwan-i-Khas pavilions in the two forts and that in the throne chamber (now the cenotaph chamber) of the Taj palace are identical. This indicates that the Taj palace must have been constructed by the person and

in the era when the two Red Forts were built. It is therefore that I hold that the Taj palace was built in (Circa) 372 A.D. and credit its construction to the Kshatriya King Anangpal. Through filial succession and conquest its ownership ultimately devolved on Jaisingh who was a contemporary of Shahjahan. Because of its hoary antiquity great wealth and rich fixtures—like gem-studded marble screens, the Peacock Throne, the silver doors and gold railings—became a part of the Taj palace. Shahjahan coveted all that wealth. And also thinking it politically expedient to write the finis to a great and powerful Rajput family he made the death of Mumtaz an occasion for talking Jaisingh out of his ancestral palace. Since then the Taj palace became converted into a tomb. It was then that the Taj Palace was also denuded of all its rich fixtures and furnishings including the gold railings, silver doors and the Peacock Throne, which found their way into Shahjahan's treasury while the Taj Palace itself was treasured in the annals of Shahjahan's reign as his own creation.

Like a beautiful dowager robbed of all her wealth the Taj Mahal stripped of all its embellishments looks magnificent even in its present bare, sombre and mournful role. What a spectacle of grandeur and splendour it must have presented in its days of regal glory when bedecked with scintillating fixtures, furnishings and trappings—such as a lush garden of rare fruit and flower trees, silver doors, gold railings, gem-studded marble grills and a resplendent Peacock Throne—its walls echoed the hurry and bustle of a powerful Rajput ruling family !

Hurried Visits Derogatory to Correct Appraisal of Taj Mahal

The visits that streams of visitors pay, day in and day out,

hurrying from Agra railway stations or the bus terminal to the Taj and back may be described as truly "aweful" in more senses than one. Such visits have in no small measure contributed in spreading and reinforcing the misleading Taj legend. Worked up to a feeling of "awe" by the traditionally doled out accounts of the Taj the average visitor is already in a trance by the time he arrives on the scene. His thinking power is benumbed. His sensibilities are further deadened by the many parrot-like accounts drummed into his ears by voluntary or paid information-pedlars. The visitor is so thoroughly dazed, stupefied, confused, overawed and hypnotized as to forget that around the basement tombs, the ground floor cenotaphs and in the first floor above the cenotaphs there are over 20 rooms in the main octagonal central marble edifice of the Taj Mahal. This was the pearl-white central Rajput marble palace. The only changes which Shahjahan seems to have made in it are : inlaying Koranic texts on flat wall stones around some arches in the inverted U-shape, and having a burial mound in the basement and cenotaphs in the Peacock Throne room. Contrary to popular belief Koranic texts occupy only an infinitesimal fraction of the immense wall area, and that too in the flat surfaces around only a few arches.

Visitors coming away from the Taj generally carry the impression that there is just one room in the basement for the graves and another above that for the cenotaphs. They express surprise if told that on the three marble floors together there are over 20 rooms which add up to the dimensions of a palace suite.

But that is not all. Below the marble platform down to

the Yamuna level are perhaps two more underground floors made up of scores of rooms. These are all shut and barred. They ought to be opened, cleaned and investigated.

Then there are the four marble towers at the corners of the marble platform, having several galleries.

There are also two huge structures, one explained away as a mosque and the other as a meaningless counterpart (jawab) to the right and left respectively as we stand near the entrance with our back to the cenotaph chamber.

If one cares to go behind the so-called mosque and the counterpart, along the outer periphery one sees huge redstone towers, many stories high, enclosing scores of rooms. The tower behind the mosque, is known as the Basai tower. Both towers are magnificent structures with protruding windows having Rajput style carved columns, brackets and arches. These towers by themselves constitute palatial suites.

Reverting to a review of the interior we find that in front of the main marble edifice is an oblong rectangular garden enclosed by massive redstone walls having long arched corridors.

As we approach the marble Taj across the green lawns, just where the lawns end if one turns to the left and proceeds to the border wall one finds a huge paved and built-in well. Peering down and overhead inside it one sees the deep cylindrical well having many stories of apartments with rooms built all around it. Two of its floors are in the basement and two above the ground floor. To the right of the well, skirting it are steps, with an entrance, now barred, to a subterranean passage which was an emergency escape route to Agra Fort.

On either side of the well are built-in apartments along the border wall.

As one stands with back turned towards the cenotaphs, at the farther end near the entrance to the Taj garden are long redstone corridors with arched columns on either side along the boundary wall. In the left-hand corner at the farther end just outside the wall is another spacious rectangular enclosure with scores of rooms now occupied by some State department.

Outside the Taj garden rectangle is another huge rectangle with a massive gate in each of the four boundary walls. On all the four sides along those walls are carved coulmns, spacious corridors and hundreds of rooms some of them housing shops and show rooms. Many are vacant.

Every entrance in the entire precincts from the outermost redstone gate to the innermost marble palace suite, has a massive gate reinforced with metal sheets or strips and knobs.

Passing right across this outer reception-rectangle, instead of turning left into the marble mausoleum lawns, if one goes out on the other side through the eastern gate and turns to the left one gets a panoramic glimpse of the long high, massive wall. At the farther end is Yamuna's placid stream. The gigantic proporticns of the entire Taj premises viewed from here leave one breathless and stunned. This outer wall reminds one of the long redstone stretch of the Delhi Red Fort wall.

In this wall at first and second floor levels one can see round stone discs which are an unmistakable Rajput emblem. The path along this wall leading to the Yamuna, is paved with bricks. This brick-paved path slopes inwards from both

sides obviously to drain away all water to the Yamuna so that the foundations may remain safe. While this path is flanked on one side by the long stretch of the redstone wall, on the other flank is a clearly discernible moat. Abutting on the moat are redstone beams. *This moat is another very significant proof of the Taj having been originally a palace.*

The Yamuna at the back served as a natural moat. The moat channel on the flank described above, is an indication that there must have been a moat on the other sides too.

If one goes to the back of the Taj on the Yamuna bank one can have an idea of the hundreds of chambers that must be there inside the long wall stretch. Two gates, now barred, open out on the rear on the Yamuna bank.

Remnants of old ghats can still be seen here. But the whole area seems to be silted up. Vegetable farming is done in this silt soil by some local people. But it would prove archaeologically very rewarding if the silt pile at the rear of the Taj upto the Yamuna stream, were to be dug up, the two gates in the back wall opened and the interior investigated.

At one end of the rear wall near the tower runs a drain dangerously close to the wall. The drain water collects in a ditch near the corner bastion. This ditch is used as a well by the vegetable gardeners to draw water by a small Persian wheel to water their garden patches. This shows that like lay visitors archaeological officials too have never bothered about the outer periphery of the Taj premises. If this neglect continues, the drain would ere long seriously undermine the foundations of the wall, the tower and the corner bastion at the Taj rear.

Apart from the hundreds of rooms, many gates, numerous

corridors and extensive quadrangles enclosing the Taj lawns and the reception-quadrangle there are many other adjuncts which the hypnotized average visitor and stupefied history scholars and students fail to take note of.

As one proceeds from the city towards the Taj, even while the outermost entrance to the Taj precincts is yet half a mile away one sees a redstone tower half buried in the ground on the right just about ten yards from the road. From the stone tower a wall can be seen jutting out and disappearing in the rising ground at an angle oblique to the asphalt approach road. On either side one can also observe several tell-tale mounds covered with grass. These hillocks obviously formed the hilly defensive eminences when the Taj was being used as a palace, and had not yet been converted into a tomb.

The tower just mentioned shows that another protective wall interspersed by watch towers enclosed an extensive area around the Taj. This wall could be the one enclosing the Khawaspura and Jaisinghpura localities around the Taj; that is to say the Taj was the ruler's palace surrounded by the dwellings of the citizenry. Excavations ought to be undertaken to dig the debris concealing this wall on either side of the tower.

At the outermost entrance to the reception-quadrangle, as one approaches by the asphalt road from the town, are again a number of redstone pavilions. All this shows that the Taj far from being built as a tomb formed the epicentre of an ancient Agra township going back perhaps to the fourth century A.D.

The Taj Mahal, as its very name suggests, was a royal residence of the ancient Rajput rulers who had Agra as their

capital. This palace formed the nucleus of an ancient township. Through successive Muslim invasions the locality became vulnerable and the palace insecure. Babur, Akbar and other Muslim conquerors had from time to time sojourned in the palace but finding the premises insecure because its defensive walls had been ruined in successive assaults they had preferred to stay within the security of Agra Fort; while the palace devolved on Jaisingh who was Shahjahan's contemporary. Shahjahan's temperament unable to tolerate the Rajput ownership of a fairyland palace decided to render it unsuitable for habitation any longer and converted it into a mausoleum. The Taj Mahal is, therefore, yet another link in the 1000-year-old mediaeval tradition in India, of converting conquered Rajput palaces and temples into tombs. The same is repeated in nearby Fatehpur Sikri.

Some People Prefer Delusion to History

The minds of some have become so thoroughly conditioned to the traditional Taj legend that they would rather be left undisturbed in smug contemplation of Shahjahan's mythical love for Mumtaz as having led to the creation of the Taj, than be asked to substitute it by what may seem a less romantic but true account of the origin of the Taj. In fact the concept of the Taj having originated as a palace is both more romantic and plausible than the idea that it is a doleful monument. But even so for those who prefer delusion to history, and to the dogmatic there is neither any cure nor appeal. Such may include both lay readers as well as those who are called students, experts and scholars of history. Others with an open mind will of course ponder over the evidence led in the foregoing pages. But to the dogmatic I cannot help narrating

the experience of a mimic who carried a young lamb in his armpit under a gown that he wore, for his stage shows. After an initial announcement that he would mimic a lamb's bleat he would press the young lamb under his gown. The audience invariably disapproved of the bleating notes as not being the real thing. The mimic would then produce similar notes with his mouth, to the apparent satisfaction of the entire audience. This has a moral for those who in spite of the considerable historical evidence to the contrary would still like to persist in the belief that the splendid Taj Mahal was not founded in joy but in mourning.



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